



SB AN

Page 200.

"Oh, hurrah! found at last!"

COLLINS' SCHOOLBOYS' ANNUAL



LONDON & GLASGOW
COLLINS' CLEAR-TYPE PRESS

THE increasing popularity of *Collins' Schoolboys' Annual* has already been clearly demonstrated by the rapid exhaustion of three very large editions.

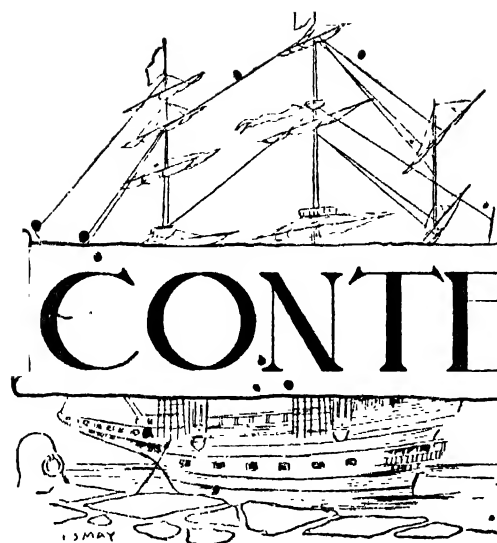
This year the Editor, Herbert Hayens, whose "Play Up" series of school stories has attained such a wide circulation, has only slightly modified the features that secured such striking success for the previous Annuals.

RICHARD KEARTON, F.Z.S., one of the foremost Nature writers has contributed an entrancing article on "Bird Photography."

There are long complete stories from GILBERT JESSOP, HAROLD AVERY, ALFRED JUDD, and the EDITOR; while the Fiction element is also strengthened by TOM BEVAN, ALASTAIR KENNEDY, and ROBERT LEIGHTON.

F. J. CAMM contributes another of his "How to Make" articles: B. S. CHANTRILL, the famous Rugby Internationalist describes the play of a full back: ARTHUR F. MURRAY, M.A., Ex-President of the Queen's Park F.C. has an article on the half-back in "Soccer," and among other interesting articles are those on Lawn-Tennis, Sports, and Indoor Games.

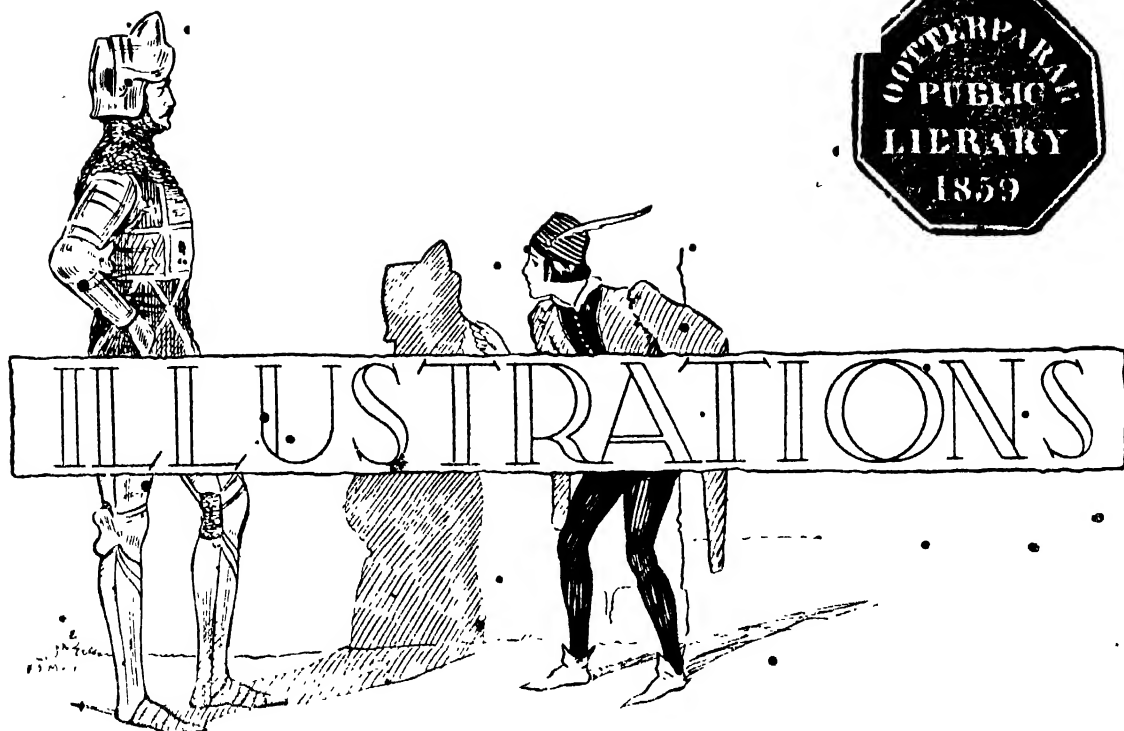
The Artists include such well-known names as those of NORMAN SUTCLIFFE, D. C. EYLES, F. S. MAY.



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IN COLOUR

OH, HURRAH!" GASPED JACK

NORMAN SUTCLIFFE

Frontispiece

IN HALF-TONE

"THROW UP YOUR HANDS!" HE COMMANDED

NORMAN SUTCLIFFE *Facing page 24*

GRAFTON'S REPLY WAS NOT IN WORDS

NORMAN SUTCLIFFE

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HE WHOM I THOUGHT ABSENT WAS THERE STANDING
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The line drawings are by D. C. Eyles, F. S. May, Norman Sutcliffe, and others.

THE TRAGEDY AT MOUNT LYDDYARD.

by
Herbert Hayens



CHAPTER I

MR. CROFTON'S PUPIL

THE summer term at St. Margaret's had nearly finished, and Crofton was discussing the approaching holidays with his two chums.

"You had better put in the first month with us, Peter," he urged. "Carew's spending most of the vac. at the Mount, and we can have a ripping time. The pater has bought a stunning motor-boat, and some of the fishermen will take us out night fishing."

"That'll be a new experience," said Peter.

"Besides," Carew added, "it may be our last chance of being together. This time next year you and I will be at

Cambridge, and Jack will have blossomed out into a financier."

"Office-boy, more likely," laughed Jack; "the pater will take jolly good care that I begin at the beginning."

"Wise man," chuckled Carew, "save you from swelled head."

"We'll need a good holiday," Peter remarked, "Carew and I will have to swot like niggers all next term. Wish my governor were something in the city instead of being at the Foreign Office. All right, old son, we'll have a month together, unless you happen to drown us in your wonderful boat."

"The chances are you'd be drowned in the sea, not in the boat," Carew corrected.

"There's just one fly in the ointment," observed Jack. "although I don't suppose

it will make much difference to us. The pater has a young fellow from Constantinople at the office, and I expect he will be down part of the time. Name's Philip Thompson, but he's only half English—his mother is a Greek. The pater does a lot of business with old Thompson, and has to stand in with him."

"Bally nuisance," grumbled Peter, "but we can lure him out into the Channel and drop him overboard."

"If he'll come," said Jack, "but I guess he'll look on us as kids; he's at least four years older."

"Look for the bridge when we come to the river," Carew suggested. "The chap may be O.K., and if he isn't, what's the odds? I shan't lie awake o' nights worrying over it."

"Perhaps your governor will leave him in London," Peter remarked hopefully—Peter's optimism was bound to break out in some direction—"gain valuable experience and all that kind of thing. Then he'll be able to teach Jack how to stamp the letters properly, and what to do with the waste-paper baskets."

"Oh, well," said Crofton, "we'll treat him decently anyhow; we're bound to do that much," a sentiment with which the others cordially agreed.

On breaking-up day Crofton and Carew left St. Margaret's together, while Peter departed for Grey Gables on the understanding that he should rejoin them as soon as he had made arrangements with his own people.

"It's awfully good of the Croftons to invite you," his father said, "they must be very patient and long-suffering. Still, it is your last fling, so to speak, you will have to buckle to in earnest after the

holidays. Try to keep out of mischief if you can."

"And don't break your neck climbing those horrid cliffs," Mrs. Shaw added; "the only time I have any peace of mind is when you are at school."

Peter looked deeply grieved. "You are down on a chap, mums," he protested reproachfully; "why, I'm so cautious that the St. Margaret fellows nickname me 'Safety-First Shaw.' Fact, mums; you ask Jack or Roger. If it wasn't for me, they'd be getting into all sorts of scrapes," at which his father laughed and Mrs. Shaw shook her head.

"I'll take a change with me on the cycle," their young hopeful continued, "and the other things can come by train. If I send a wire, Jack and Roger will ride part way to meet me, and I'll be as careful as anything."

"About that boat!" said Mr. Shaw, a trifle uneasily, "you will promise not to go out in dirty weather?"

"We won't go, dad, unless the fishermen tell us it's safe," and with this promise Mr. Shaw was perfectly content: the boy had many faults, but he never broke his given word.

Peter started early next morning and met his chums about twenty miles east of Dum Tor Junction, where passengers by train changed for the local railway. The day was fine, with a hot sun, tempered by a cool breeze, which the riders found extremely pleasant.

"Well," exclaimed Peter, after the first greetings, "got your Greek? What's he like?"

Jack's reply was a significant shrug of the shoulders, but Carew answered brightly, "Not so dusty; shy, and no doubt feels

a bit out of things, but he tries to be agreeable. Not quite our cut, of course, but ——" "Right-o," said Peter, "I understand. You ought to be a diplomatist, Carew."

Crofton laughed. "You'll see the johnny at dinner," he added, "and can form your own opinion."

The Anglo-Greek youth did not impress Peter favourably. His age was probably twenty-one; he had a long face, sallow in complexion, a prominent nose, a pointed chin, and flabby lips. His dark hair was oiled and patted down perfectly flat; his eyes were small, set widely apart, and shifty in expression. He spoke English well, but his voice was thin and hard. As Carew had observed, he seemed to feel out of things, but he evidently desired to make himself agreeable.

The boys, however, speedily learned that he had little in common with them. Walking and climbing fatigued him, he did not cycle, and he declined, with many expressions of gratitude, to trust himself in the boat, even on the calmest day. Part of his time was spent with Mr. Crofton, the remainder he devoted to what Jack called mooning about and smoking fags.

"Thank goodness, he doesn't want to pal in with us," said Peter, "we've no use for a chap of that sort. He'd be a nuisance anywhere."

"Never played cricket," grunted Jack; "doesn't know the difference between soccer and rugger, calls boxing brutal, and advised Carew to go slow on the bike or he'll get his neck broken."

"But he has points," Carew remarked; "he gets through more fags in a day than all three of us put together in a year."

"He looks it," said Peter.

After the first two or three days the boys

stopped inviting him to join in their excursions. The weather was gloriously fine, and they swam and boated, went for long tramps, cycled and fished, and had what Peter described as a high old time.

But there was one thing that slightly damped their pleasure; Mr. Crofton seemed unlike his usual gay, jovial self. He always had a laugh and a joke for them, but there was a worried look in his eyes, and a great portion of his time was taken up with business matters. Telegrams arrived frequently, and often he went off at a moment's notice to London, sometimes carrying Philip with him.

"Can't make the pater out at all," said Jack one morning, as they started for a cruise, "he looked regularly in the dumps before breakfast. And as far as holidays go he might just as well have stayed in London. These rotten wires come pouring in all day and every day. And he never used to do any business at the Mount. Left almost everything to his manager."

"He was jolly enough at breakfast," said Peter.

"That was put on so that the mater shouldn't be upset; he wouldn't have her worried for the world. But there's something wrong. Haven't you noticed how he has changed, Carew?"

"He certainly seems a bit off colour. One of his big deals not panning out properly, perhaps. Bound to come up against awkward snags at times, old son. But he'll pull round all right."

"I hope so," muttered Jack, a trifle despondently; "wish I could help him."

"Cheerio," cried Peter, "don't pull such a long face, man. To-morrow the sun will be shining, although it is cloudy

to-day, which it isn't. Come on, here's the old tin kettle waiting for us. Once aboard the lugger and the girl is mine, or yours, or Carew's, I don't mind particularly. Hallo, there's Megson. Any danger in going out to-day, Megson?"

"Not the least bit for a sensible boat," the old fisherman replied, with a disapproving glance at the "new-fangled contraption."

"That's one in the eye for you, Jack," his chum exclaimed with a laugh.

Realising that Crofton was genuinely troubled about his father, Peter did everything possible to raise his spirits, making bad jokes and worse puns, telling funny stories, chaffing Carew, and poking fun at the absent Thompson. By degrees Crofton's depression wore off, and they had a jolly day, returning in the highest spirits.

They found Mrs. Crofton alone; an urgent telegram in the forenoon had called her husband to London, and his pupil had gone with him.

"Your father must have important business to transact," she remarked to Jack; "Mackie"—that was the manager—"doesn't seem able to carry on without him a single day. And he is so much in need of a rest."

"Is there anything serious the matter?"

"Some unexpected difficulty in Greece, I expect, but it has come at an unfortunate time."

"He'll soon straighten things out," Jack remarked, "and be able to have a real holiday."

He spoke with much more confidence than he really felt, but there was no sense in alarming his mother; besides, he had no actual reason for supposing that anything had gone wrong. No doubt his

father had often big obstacles to surmount, and things would be all right again before long. He tried to throw off his vague fears and to help his mother pass a pleasant evening.

"I'm a regular ass," he confided to Carew. "Of course, there are heaps of things the pater has to do himself."

"Bound to be," agreed Carew coolly, "but they crop up mostly when you're at school, and he's at the office, so that you don't know of 'em. There's nothing to worry about really."

"That's so, and yet I can't get it out of my head that something nasty is going to happen."

Carew laughed genially. "Nonsense! don't go filling your noddle with a lot of silly rubbish; leave that to Peter. You'll be laughing at yourself this time to-morrow."

The speaker had drawn a bow at a venture, but it seemed as if the arrow had hit the mark. Mr. Crofton returned from his flying visit to town in good form, and there was no hint of care in his smiling eyes or jovial laugh.

"Poor old Mackie's developing nerves," he remarked at dinner; "dragged me up to the office yesterday for just a trifle; might easily have settled the matter himself. Got what you boys, I believe, call cold feet. Horrible slang they talk at school nowadays, Philip; your father wouldn't understand a tenth of it."

"Sometimes I am left wondering," his pupil confessed amiably, "but I--what you call--make a shot at it. To have cold feet is to have a fright, is it not?"

"Hit the bull's eye first time," said Peter; "not bad at all, that."

"But should it not be cold back?" Thompson suggested. "When I am frightened it is my back that goes cold; my feet—they may be quite warm."

"Same with me," Jack agreed, "but

Though a muff at outdoor sports, Thompson was an expert billiard player. He had a sure touch, a wonderful control of the balls, and apparently a true eye. And he was so absorbed by the game that his usually wretched nerves did not appear to



"Not the least bit for a sensible boat," the old fisherman replied.

after all one could hardly talk about cold back," and he laughed.

"Well, I hope Mackie will keep both parts of his anatomy warm and not spoil my holiday any more," said Mr. Crofton, getting up and, addressing his pupil, "Shall we knock the balls about for half an hour?"

trouble him. He could give his host fifty in a hundred and beat him easily.

"It is just a knack," he explained modestly, when Mr. Crofton complimented him on his skill, "I think it should have something to do with my fingers."

He had a very shapely hand, with long,

tapering fingers, supple yet sinewy, and a firm wrist.

"You ought to make a capable musician," said Mrs. Crofton, who had come in for a few minutes to watch the game, but he shook his head, saying, "I do not care for music, and what one does not care for is always difficult."

The boys did not stay long; they had arranged a cycle run for the morning, and went off to discuss their plans and finish their preparations.

"Seems to be all O.K.," remarked Peter, as they trooped out; "signal set for 'Line clear,' eh!" and Jack nodded.

CHAPTER II

A MYSTERIOUS MEETING

THE next few days passed without any particular incident. Mackie had apparently returned to his normal state, for no more urgent telegrams arrived at the Mount, and Mr. Crofton was left to enjoy his holiday in peace. The boys spent nearly all their time in the open air, starting directly after breakfast and not returning until evening. Thompson continued to mope about by himself, in spite of their renewed invitation to join them.

"Can't make him out at all," remarked Peter, as they started out one morning; "he's as jumpy as if he'd committed a murder and expected to see a ghost."

"Too many fags and not enough exercise," said Carew; "quite enough to jag a fellow's nerves."

"Tumbled over him last night at the side gate," Peter said, "and he almost

jumped with fright. The chap was in a real funk, though goodness knows why."

Crofton good-humouredly gave his chum a dig in the ribs. "Dry up, old son," he advised, "or you'll be on the track of another first-class mystery."

"Peter's a long way from being Peter Bell," laughed Carew. "A primrose by the river brim is a whole jungle full of poisonous plants."

"Well, I shouldn't call Thompson a primrose exactly," said Peter.

"Prejudice, old son; the chap's out of sorts, feeling a bit homesick very likely."

"The pater says he's awfully smart at figures, and sharp as a needle in the way of business. And now I vote we give him a miss for the rest of the day; we've done our best."

"Right-o," cried Peter, although that young gentleman had already begun to spin a startling and melodramatic romance around their Anglo-Greek visitor.

The subject dropped, and neither of his chums thought any more of it until a couple of evenings later, when an incident occurred which filled Carew with a vague sense of uneasiness. He had been visiting his aunt and was returning rather late to the Mount. He had taken the shore road, and his thoughts were engaged on the fishing excursion the boys had planned for the morning.

Save for the lap, lap of the waves on the beach the night was very still, and it was with a start of surprise that Carew suddenly recognised the sound of voices. In any other place such a simple matter would have passed unheeded, but he had reached the road which was used almost entirely as a passage from The Cottage to Mount Lydyard. It was very unusual

to meet any one there who was not going to or coming from the big house.

Carew stopped to listen. The sound which had died down now rose again, and floated across to him. His astonishment and perplexity increased. Some one, as yet unseen, was speaking in an angry tone, and, what struck the boy as being very remarkable, in a strange language. Carew was fairly proficient in French, but had no acquaintance with any other European tongue.

"It may be Greek," he concluded, "and if so the second man is Thompson. Rather odd that he didn't invite his visitor to the Mount! And they are evidently quarrelling, or at least the stranger is."

At first he had intended to walk on and take no notice, but his curiosity was so keenly aroused that he crept cautiously to within a few yards of the spot where the men stood. They were still hidden from sight, and the words which reached him were unintelligible, but he could distinguish two voices, one loud, domineering, and angry; the other timid and supplicating.

"The second sounds like Thompson, but I can't be sure," he muttered. "What on earth does it all mean?"

The conversation continued for another five minutes and then stopped. Directly afterwards Carew heard what sounded like a jingling of keys, and the man with the loud voice spoke again. He was no longer angry, and it seemed to the hidden listener that his tone was one of scarcely concealed triumph.

"He's got his own way, whatever it is," Carew thought, "but, after all, it isn't my funeral. I'd like to make certain, though, if the second chap is Thompson. Now

they are saying good-bye. If one goes back, it must be to the Mount."

Hiding behind a boulder, he waited expectantly. There was a sound of footsteps, and he realised that one man only was coming towards the road. There was still a fair amount of light and Carew's eyes were sharp. The man who approached was a complete stranger, and unmistakably a foreigner. He was a trifle above the medium height, sallow and sharp-featured, with crafty eyes, and cunning stamped all over his face.

"A wrong 'un, without a doubt," was Carew's silent comment.

The stranger walked briskly, evidently well satisfied with the result of his visit, and about twenty yards along turned abruptly into a recess of the rocks. Carew, on the point of leaving his own hiding-place, stopped to watch what would happen. In a minute or two the stranger reappeared with a motor-cycle, which he pushed laboriously over the uneven road.

There was by now no sign of the man's companion, and Carew proceeded towards the Mount in a state of bewildering perplexity. That the stranger was up to no good he felt sure; that his companion was Mr. Crofton's pupil was almost equally certain; but what possible connection could there be between the two?

"Of course, it may not have been Thompson," the boy thought, "and yet it must have been some one belonging to the Mount, and there's no one else there who understands any outlandish lingo. It's a regular puzzle, yet simple enough, no doubt, if one had the proper key."

Jack and Peter were overhauling their fishing tackle when he reached the house.

It had been arranged to cycle to a freshwater lake some twenty or thirty miles off, and to put in a day's fishing. Carew glanced round and remarked casually, "Thompson not here? You didn't persuade him to come with us, then?"

Peter sniffed. "The silly owl doesn't know one end of a rod from the other. Told us at dinner that he couldn't see anything in fishing."

Carew laughed. "No harm in trying my eloquence on him," he exclaimed, moving towards the door.

"You won't find him in the billiard-room. Had a nasty headache and been mooning about outside somewhere since dinner. Came in a few minutes ago and went straight to his room. He really did look awfully seedy."

"Serve him jolly well right," exclaimed Peter vigorously; "he should chuck away his beastly fags and take decent exercise. Did you get those flies, old man?"

Carew produced his case, and Thompson was completely forgotten, while they discussed the merits of this and that fly with the zeal and enthusiasm of veteran fishermen.

But when later they went to bed Carew discovered that the puzzling incident had a firm grip on his mind. He was worried and uneasy, though, as he told himself, without cause. Naturally Thompson had heaps of foreign acquaintances, and if he chose to make an appointment with one of them it didn't concern any one else. It might look queer to an outsider, but he had no right to ask for an explanation. Ought he to inform Mr. Crofton? But what was there to tell? That he had accidentally overheard Thompson talking

to a strange man. It seemed pretty fooling when one came down to bedrock! Still, when at length he dropped off to sleep, he had not altogether got rid of his vague feeling of uneasiness.

Thompson did not put in an appearance at breakfast; his headache was worse, and he preferred to remain quietly in bed. There was nothing really serious, and he would be down for lunch.

"He looked pretty well washed out last night," Jack remarked.

"He should have come with us," said Peter unfeelingly, "that would have cured his headache."

Carew offered no comment; he was wondering how much the headache had to do with the visit from the ill-looking stranger.

The fishing expedition, except in the matter of catching fish, was a big success; the weather held fine, the roads, though bad, were passable. Cook had behaved handsomely in the way of cakes and pastries.

"Wonder if that chump's any better," said Peter, as they lay lazily by the side of the lake finishing the catables before starting on the homeward journey.

"There was a funny thing last night," said Carew. "I didn't mention it, but I've been thinking of it most of the day."

"About Thompson?"

"Yes; no doubt there's a simple explanation, but the thing puzzles me. I may as well tell you the story," and he proceeded to relate what had happened on the previous evening.

"A queer yarn," exclaimed Crofton. "They would be talking Greek, and it's pretty clear that Thompson was the other chap. I wonder he didn't invite his friend



Jack looked at the words in a puzzled sort of way.

to the house, the pater would have made him welcome."

"As far as I could judge, there wasn't any enthusiastic friendship," observed Carew dryly; "the strange man seemed to be bullying him mostly. And he evidently had no wish to be seen, or he would have put up his bike at the Pilehard."

"Did you get a good look at him?"

"Yes," and Carew gave his chums a none too flattering description of the stranger.

"Some fellow that he knew out East," Jack suggested. "And that he's afraid of."

"He certainly looked pretty sick when he came in!"

"The fellow has some sort of hold over him and is after money; it's a clear case of blackmail," exclaimed Peter, whose active brain had already mapped out the first chapter of an exciting "blood." "Very likely that's why he was sent over here in the first place."

"Oh, shut up, you owl! Talk about a mountain from a mole-hill: you'd make a bigger desert than Sahara out of a grain of sand. The thing looks a bit fishy, but, as Carew says, there's almost sure to be a simple explanation."

"What bothers me," remarked Carew, "is whether I ought to tell your pater! It seems a silly sort of yarn to go to him with; he'd probably laugh at me. Besides, the chap has a right to manage his own

affairs, and I detest playing the part of a Nosey Parker."

"And you may do a lot of mischief without meaning it."

"That's very likely."

They discussed the point some time longer, going over the pros and cons, and finally decided to keep silent about the incident, at least for the present.

"Time enough to interfere if anything fresh crops up," Jack observed.

Rather curiously Peter showed some reluctance in agreeing to this conspiracy of silence. "The chap's a bounder and not my style," he said, "but if he's in a hole it's hardly cricket to stand by with our hands in our pockets. I expect he got into a mess before coming here, and this fellow is squeezing him dry. Mr. Crofton is just the man to stop that kind of thing."

However, when his companions pointed out that this was merely guesswork, and that he had actually no grounds to go upon, he gave way, although very unwillingly, and with a resolve to keep a sharp look-out for the unprepossessing foreigner.

On their return they met Thompson strolling around the house. His headache had nearly gone, he said, in answer to their questions, but he had a jaded appearance, and a worried expression in his eyes.

"Looks for all the world as if he knew some one was holding a sword over his head," was how the melodramatic Peter summed up the situation; "wish I could ask him what the trouble is!"

This was impossible, but directly after breakfast next morning Peter took his motor-cycle, and without saying a word to his chums, slipped off on a voyage of inquiry. It would be a point scored if he

could discover some clue to the identity of the mysterious stranger.

"Guess he gave the village a wide berth," the boy muttered, "but it may be worth trying."

Without betraying undue interest he made his inquiries, calling at the Pilehard as the most likely place at which to obtain information, skilfully dropping a question here and there, but without result. No one in the village, or even in the scattered cottages on the main road, had noticed a cyclist of any description on that particular night.

"Carew was right," he concluded; "whoever the fellow was he didn't mean to draw attention to himself, which makes the thing look fishier still. I hope I'll have the luck to be on the spot if the gentleman comes again."

CHAPTER III

THE STRANGE FOREIGNER

SEVERAL days passed and nothing unusual occurred. Thompson had recovered from his slight illness, and the boys were enjoying themselves so thoroughly that the memory of the strange incident began to fade into the background. One morning, however, their interest was revived in a peculiar manner.

The post-bag generally arrived at breakfast-time, and Mr. Crofton distributed the letters. Occasionally there was one for Peter, from Grey Gables, which he invariably opened immediately. Mrs. Crofton also read hers, while her husband, after putting aside those of a business character,

glanced at the others. Thompson, the boys noticed, always carried off his correspondence to be read in private.

One morning Mr. Crofton passed two or three letters to his wife, one to Peter, and one to Thompson, who glanced hastily at the address and then hurriedly thrust the missive into his pocket. Jack, who happened to be looking across the table at the moment, caught a fleeting expression of fear and dismay in his eyes. Though it passed quickly there could be no doubt as to its reality.

"Wonder what the chap's afraid of?" he thought.

No one else noticed that anything was amiss; Peter was relating the details of an interesting story to Carew, and Mrs. Crofton was engrossed in a letter from her sister. Thompson, with an apology to his hostess, was the first to get up, and Jack heard him cross quickly to the library.

"Poor beggar," he muttered, "he's got a dowier this time by the look of his face—like dirty gray paper. Perhaps Peter was right, and some brute is squeezing him, I wonder if I should give the pater a hint. But after all, there's nothing solid to go on, and I may be made to look a fat-headed chump."

He drank another cup of tea and got up, leaving the others still at the table. Why not ask the chap straight out if there was anything wrong and if he could help? It would, at least, give Thompson an opening, which he could take advantage of or not as he pleased.

The library door was ajar and he entered, but the place was empty. "Gone up to his own room! I guess there'll be another headache presently."

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He turned round to go out again, when his attention was attracted by a scrap of paper which lay half-way across the threshold. It was a half sheet of notepaper, containing a few boldly written words, but neither signature nor address. Jack looked at the words in a puzzled sort of way, and at first could make nothing of them!

"Wednesday. Blue Lion. Exeter, 1.30."

Then a light dawned on him. "That will be the letter that came just now," he muttered; "what on earth can it mean?"

He put the paper in his pocket, intending to have a big think in his own room, and had just reached the bottom of the staircase when Thompson came flying down. Without stopping, he made straight for the library, evidently in a tremendous fright.

"I ought to return his precious letter," Jack thought, "but I'll have another look at it first."

Shutting himself in his bedroom, he took out the paper and studied it afresh.

"Wednesday—that's to-day," he said; "the Blue Lion will be the old posting-inn, and 1.30 may be the time fixed for an appointment. It's a command—not even a request—to meet the other chap at Exeter. Let's see, he'll have to catch the 11.15 at the junction!"

Jack sat for a long time, frankly at a loss how to act. Spying on his father's pupil wasn't a nice thing, but leaving him to face his trouble—whatever it was—alone, might be worse. Peter had declared truly that it wasn't cricket, not by a long way. And there was no doubt that the chap was badly in the soap.

B . .

"And he won't admit it to me," Jack reflected; "looks on me as a kid. But the pater will get to the bottom of the mystery, if I can show him something definite to work on."

Jack did not pretend to any friendship for their visitor, but he seemed to be in a mess of some sort, and it was the proper thing to help him out, though how that could be done remained a puzzle. However, he went down to find his chums, who were waiting for him impatiently.

"You fellows will have to get on by yourselves to-day," he said; "I'm off on my own, but don't make a song about it."

"What's up?" they asked eagerly.

"Tell you this evening. We'll start out together, and I'll leave you at the village; then no one need be any the wiser. But don't ask questions now, because I shan't answer 'em."

"Right-o," exclaimed Peter, "though it's pretty rotten of you."

"What you don't know you can't tell," said Jack sagely; "and now let us make a start."

They rode together as far as the village, where Jack parted company. His intention was to cycle to the junction, put up his machine, and wait for Thompson, who, he felt certain, would obey the order contained in the letter. His conscience hinted that he was doing a shabby trick, and he halted more than once on the road, half inclined to turn back and wash his hands of the affair altogether.

"I'm a bally ass poking my nose into another chap's business," he reflected, "and a bit of a sneak too. And yet I can't help the silly cuckoo without finding out what's wrong. Why didn't the fellow stay in his own place?"

Jack was well known at Dum Tor, where the porter willingly took charge of his machine and stowed it away safely.

"Coming back to-day, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jack, "by the 4.20, if I get through my business in time."

Having bought a return ticket, he walked up and down the platform until the local was signalled, when he slipped into the waiting-room and watched the few passengers alight. The sight of Thompson swept away all his scruples. The fellow looked wretchedly ill; not physically so much as mentally. He walked quickly to the main platform, glancing frequently over his shoulder in a state of nervous agitation. He wasn't even smoking one of his fags!

"Pretty well at the end of his tether," thought Jack; "too cowed to put up the least bit of a fight. Poor beggar!"

As soon as Thompson entered a first-class compartment, Jack got into a third, where he sat wondering what would be the outcome of this strange chase. At Exeter, Thompson hung about the platform for several minutes, as if reluctant to leave the station, but at length he braced himself up and departed, with Jack following at a safe distance. In front of the Blue Lion he stopped again, looked at his watch, took a cigarette from his case but did not light it, and finally, pushing open the swing door, disappeared.

If Jack Crofton had been Sherlock Holmes he would have known precisely how to act; as it was, his ideas were vague and indefinite. What he desired most was to get a good look at the sender of the letter, and to decide if he was the man described by Carew. It wasn't an easy job to manage, but, taking his courage in both hands, he

walked to the entrance of the hotel and stepped inside.

"I was to meet a gentleman here at 1.20, but am late," he explained to the hall porter. "Tall and dark, and wears a monocle."

into the man's hand, "I'll have a look round. Afraid I'm in for an awful wiggling."

His task proved much easier than he had dared to hope for. There were many people in the room, but no one took the slightest notice of him. He moved quickly



"A wrong 'un, without a doubt," was Carew's silent comment.

"I haven't noticed him, sir; he may be in the lounge; I'll see."

He was back in a few seconds with the information that the lounge was empty, and suggested that perhaps the gentleman had got tired of waiting and gone to lunch.

"Very likely," Jack laughed, "he's awfully impatient," and slipping a shilling

but quietly, casting a searching glance at every table, until in a far corner he saw the men he was seeking. Without giving a second glance to Thompson he focused all his attention on the stranger.

Crofton recalled Carew's description of the man whom he had met on the road—sallow of complexion, sharp of feature,

crafty-eyed, with an air of cunning, and a cruel mouth. Crofton left the room immediately, and with a passing word to the porter went into the street. He felt alarmed as well as puzzled. What hold had this cruel-looking stranger over Thompson? and what, was he planning to do?

Presently the two came out together, the foreigner with a sneering air of triumph, Thompson nervous and miserable, and thoroughly cowed. They parted at the entrance, and after a while Jack returned slowly and thoughtfully to the railway station.

"I'm getting out of my depth," he muttered, "I'll have to tell the pater, and leave it to him."

But he found it impossible to relate his story that night, as Mr. Crofton had gone to Bristol and would not return till the next day. His chums saw that something serious had happened, but he gave them no opportunity of putting any questions.

Thompson came in to dinner; he looked white and out of sorts, but pleaded a headache, and in reply to his hostess answered cheerfully that he would be all right after a night's rest. He had thrown off or suppressed his fear, and had no longer the cowed look in his eyes that had so impressed Jack during the afternoon.

The three chums went upstairs together, and, as if impelled by a common instinct, turned into Carew's bedroom, where Jack, amidst much excitement, explained what had happened.

"Sure it was the same chap?" asked Carew.

"Dead certain, couldn't be mistaken! And he's got a regular strangle hold over Thompson. He's a cruel beggar, too."

Carew nodded. "There's only one thing to do," he remarked, "you'll have to inform your pater. We're out of our depth altogether."

"Just my opinion, old man. I don't care a rap for Thompson, but we can't let a fellow go under without putting out a hand to help him. And he's in a pretty deep pit; never in my life saw any one so scared."

Peter naturally took an opposite view. Here was the chance of a really fine adventure, and it seemed an awful pity to waste it. He argued that the foreigner was a shady customer, who would not wish the attention of the police directed to his movements.

"Why not find out all we can about him?" he argued. "There's certain to be something, and we can threaten to run him in unless he clears off."

"Don't be an idiot," said Carew briskly. "There's only one way, and that is to tell Mr. Crofton everything. He'll get the truth of the story out of Thompson, learn who the man is, and set the police on his track."

"Thompson mayn't be so eager to confess the truth," suggested Peter; "he may have something to hide as well."

"Likely enough," Jack admitted, "but anyhow, I intend the pater to know directly he returns."

"That's the best plan," agreed Carew heartily, "and now both you fellows clear out, I'm dead fagged, and Shaw can hardly keep his eyes open."

He and Peter had been out most of the day and were really very tired, although Peter protested vigorously that he could stay awake all night. However, Carew insisted, wished them good-night, turned

them both out of the room, and shut the door.

"Hospitable sort of chap that, eh!" grinned Peter. "Well, I'm off; so long, old son."

His mind was very busy with Jack's curious yarn as he undressed and got into bed. He loved a mystery, and here was one which baffled him completely, right under his nose. And, if Jack and Carew had been proper sports, he could have discovered the secret for himself!

"As easy as falling off a log," he grumbled; "shadow Thompson, spot this foreigner, hunt him down, discover what there is fishy about him—sure to be something—and then warn him off. That would be prime. But these bally owls haven't an ounce of imagination!"

Still grumbling at being deprived of such a spicy adventure, he turned over on his side, closed his eyes, and speedily fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

A SHOT AT MIDNIGHT

LESS fortunate than his chums, Jack found it impossible to sleep. He lay a long while staring into the darkness and wondering. He was restless, fidgety, and even a little nervous. He wished his father was at home. The face of the stranger at the Blue Lion haunted him, the cruelty and the cunning of it made him afraid. To be in the power of such a man must be terrible, and Thompson was in his power. There was no doubt of that, none whatever.

He closed his eyes tightly and pressed his face against the pillow; even so, it

was difficult to shut out the object that worried him. There was no personal danger, but Jack disliked mysteries; he preferred seeing everything, good or evil, in a clear light.

Perhaps he was making a fuss out of nothing; or at least enlarging a mole-hill into a mountain. No doubt Thompson had got into some sort of scrape, but, after all, it might amount to very little. Very likely the pater would have a good laugh at his tale! It was odd that he couldn't go to sleep; generally he dropped off like a stone. He counted slowly from one to a hundred several times; he drove a flock of sheep through a gap in the hedge, numbering them one by one, and found himself wide awake at the end of the performance. He turned and twisted restlessly, and, at last, getting out of bed, walked about the room.

The house was very still, and he envied the inmates, who were all sleeping soundly. He felt angry and annoyed at his own foolishness. Why should he be worried over another fellow's affairs? He would forget all about the mystery and go to sleep. If there was anything wrong the pater would put it right. That was sound common sense.

He was on the point of getting into bed again when a slight noise outside attracted his attention. Though very faint, it was quite distinct, and he listened wonderingly. The next instant he heard it again.

"Just as if some one had tiptoed past the room," he muttered, "but it's pure fancy; one hears all sorts of strange noises in the night."

In spite of that, he opened the door softly and peeped out. To his amazement he perceived a dim figure which had reached

the end of the corridor and was about to descend the staircase. Though barefoot and clothed only in his pyjamas, Jack did not hesitate. He was naturally brave in face of a known danger, and this at first sight appeared simple. A burglar by some means or other had got into the house and was prowling around in search of booty. It would have been nice to have Carew's help, but there was no time to fetch him.

Swiftly, though cautiously, his bare feet making no sound, he stole along the corridor and peered down the staircase. Evidently he was too late, the mysterious figure had vanished.

"Pretty slick work," thought the boy, "but I'll probably get him in the dining-room."

The lower part of the house, however, proved empty. Jack opened door after door, but no one was in any of the rooms. He paused occasionally to listen; his hearing was acute, but not the faintest sound reached him. Then he began to reflect. Was it all a matter of fancy? The day had been an exciting one, and his nerves were a little out of order. Both the sound outside his door and the figure at the head of the staircase might easily have been imaginary.

"Besides," he considered, "unless the fellow had got in through a skylight, what would he be doing upstairs? Not likely to find anything very valuable up there. My aunt, if old Peter gets to hear about this stunt, he'll rag me to death. And Carew won't forget to give me a few digs."

Still he persevered in the search until it became clear that no one but himself was downstairs. Dining-room, drawing-room,

library were all empty and had not been disturbed. At last he hurried back to go upstairs again. Now that the excitement had worn off he became a little more nervous. It was not a nice thing going to his room in the dark. Suppose there really was a burglar, crouched in some corner, waiting to tap him on the head! The idea was far from cheery.

But Jack was not the kind of boy to be beaten by his fears. From the first landing a passage to the right led to a room which his mother kept for her own use. Jack crept along and tried the door; it was locked, as was always the case except when Mrs. Crofton was there. Stealing back to the landing, he tried the passage to the left containing his father's sanctum, a holy of holies which few but the owner ever entered.

Suddenly the boy came to a dead stop, seized by a nameless fear. A soft, almost indefinable thread of light at the bottom of the door showed that the room was occupied. Jack's heart almost ceased beating. Had his father returned without warning? Had something terrible happened? In a vague way Jack knew that lately his father had lost a great deal of money. Had there been a final crash? And if so——? Even Peter's vivid imagination had never reached the heights to which Jack's soared during those few awful seconds.

What was to be done? He could not return to his room with this terrible fear tugging at his heart. He would try the door cautiously, so that his father should not hear. But first he listened. All was silent inside; no sound came to him. He tried the handle, and to his surprise it yielded to his touch. Very cautiously

he opened the door a tiny bit and looked inside.

For the better part of a minute Jack stood spellbound by what he saw. The room was lit by a shaded electric lamp which stood on the table. Close by was Mr. Crofton's private desk: it had been unlocked, and one of the drawers remained open. At the table sat the young Anglo-Greek, busily copying on to a sheet of paper the contents of a small, slim manuscript book. He was so engrossed in his work that the partial opening of the door had not disturbed him.

Jack continued to regard him with ever-increasing wonder. Obviously something was amiss, but what? He had no clue to the mystery, nor the faintest idea of what his father's pupil was doing. How had he managed to open the door? and the desk? What was the fellow transcribing so feverishly? The little book must contain the pater's most treasured secrets. Jack himself had never seen it before. And this scalawag was making a copy. The dirty cad! Jack clenched his fists and wished he had brought a horsewhip with him.

Suddenly the writer stopped; a slight noise, or perhaps merely the draught, had attracted his notice. He laid down the fountain-pen, raised his head and glanced around nervously. At sight of the watcher framed in the doorway his face became livid; sweat broke out in beads on his forehead; his whole body trembled, he was crazy with shame and fear. He sat gazing as if fascinated by the apparition.

Jack had not moved. "How did you get into my father's room? and what are you doing here?" he asked grimly.

The other returned no answer, intense

fear had deprived him of all power of speech, he simply stared straight in front of him.

"How came my father's desk to be open?" Jack continued. "What are you doing with his private papers?"

The young man's lips twitched nervously, but only an inarticulate sound issued from them.

Jack took a step toward him. "Leave everything as it is and come with me," he said sternly. "I am going to lock you in your room and stay with you until my father returns. Then I hope he will hand you over to the police."

Thompson shuddered violently. There was froth on his lips and abject terror in his eyes. He tried to stand, and would have fallen had the table not been there. He leaned against it unsteadily and wailed: "Let me go; oh, let me go."

Jack looked at him in disgust. "You are a miserable funk as well as a cad," he cried, and the other, as if the flood-gates of speech had been suddenly unbarred, went on pleading pitifully, pouring out a torrent of words, now in English, now in Greek.

"Oh, shut up," Jack exclaimed rudely, "and keep all that truck for my father; it won't move me. Are you coming? or shall I call for Shaw and Carew?"

What was passing through the crazed mind no one will ever learn, probably Thompson himself had only the haziest notion, but suddenly his right hand slipped to his hip pocket and he brought out a small automatic pistol. Perhaps his fear had passed into madness; the whining ceased, he stopped trembling, and levelled the weapon.

"Throw your hands up," he commanded,

"and if you make any sound I will kill you."

It was impossible to doubt that, either through excessive fear or some other emotion, he was in deadly earnest; he meant to shoot and shoot to kill. Jack realised the danger, but he had a stout heart, and his answer was prompt and decisive. With a loud shout for his chums, he made a low dive at his opponent's ankles.

Taken completely by surprise, Thompson lost his balance and fell, while Jack made a clutch at his right arm. There was a momentary struggle, the report of a pistol shot, and the boy rolled over on his side. He attempted to rise, got, by the help of a chair, unsteadily to his feet, swayed to and fro for a couple of seconds, and tumbled again to the floor.

Meanwhile, Carew, who was a light sleeper, heard the shout, followed by the discharge of the pistol, and, jumping quickly out of bed, ran across to Shaw's room.

"Come on, quick," he shouted; "don't stop to dress; something serious has happened downstairs."

"Where's Jack?"

"Down there; I heard him call for us. Then there was a shot."

"Burglars," cried Peter. He picked up a poker and hurried out with his chum. They raced along the corridor quite heedless of danger—Peter generally acted first and thought afterwards—down the staircase to the landing. The door of Mr. Crofton's sanctum was wide open, and a soft light illuminated the passage.

"This way," cried Peter, running at full speed and brandishing his primitive weapon. His mind was still obsessed by the idea

of a burglar, and he called out, "Collar the beggar if he tries to slip past."

But no one met them, and they heard no sound. Stopping at the door they looked in; the room appeared empty. By this time the noise had aroused the inmates of the house, who came running down in various stages of undress.

"What is the matter?" Mrs. Crofton demanded; "what has happened?"

"A burglar," replied Peter, "and Jack has gone after him."

Always eager and impulsive, he was on the point of rushing off in pursuit when Carew stopped him, and, turning to the servants, asked them to search the house. When they had withdrawn he said, "Mrs. Crofton, you must brace yourself for a shock. Jack is lying under the table; I am afraid he is hurt."

Bewildered, but keeping her feelings well under control, Jack's mother crossed the room with the two boys following closely. No one would have guessed what a terrible fear gripped her heart, as she stooped down and said evenly, "Jack! what is it, dear? Where are you hurt?"

The boy's eyes were open; the pain from his wound was acute, but he tried hard to smile. It was a brave effort, though the smile was rather wintry. He spoke with difficulty, and they had to stoop very close to catch the words which came at intervals.

"Don't worry, mums," he whispered, "I'll be all right soon. Pure accident; all my fault." He regarded his chums with a certain keenness. "Stupid accident, you fellows," he said huskily, "my fault. Don't forget."

"All right, old chap," Carew replied, "we understand."



• Throw your hands up! • he commanded

The answer appeared to satisfy him; he smiled again at his mother, and his eyes closed.

"Fetch Dr. Pollitt, Peter," said Mrs. Crofton; "Roger and I will do what we can until he comes. And tell Lizzie to bring hot water and brandy. Push back the table, Roger, so that we can have more room. He has been shot, look at the blood!"

CHAPTER V

MR. CROFTON'S PUPIL DISAPPEARS

PETER delivered his message to Lizzie, bade the chauffeur get the small car out, rushed upstairs to put on his shoes and a top-coat, and down again at breakneck speed. The chauffeur was ready, some one flung the gate open, and the car, once outside the yard, flew over the bumpy road in the direction of Dr. Pollitt's house.

Peter sat back and thought hard. This was a tremendous adventure, and but for the injury to his chum he would have enjoyed it immensely. And there was a mystery, too, about the whole affair that fascinated him. What was Jack doing downstairs after he had gone to bed? How did he get into his father's room? The door was always kept locked, and, besides, every one at Mount Lydyard regarded the den as sacred. It was an unwritten law that no one besides Mr. Crofton and his wife should ever enter it. Even Jack rarely went inside, and then only by his father's express invitation.

And there were other things too! Very little escaped Peter's sharp eyes, and he

had noticed the open drawer, the manuscript book, the paper partly filled with recent writing, an uncapped fountain-pen lying on the table. All pieces of a very pretty puzzle if he could manage to put them together. One thing he knew—the pen didn't belong to his chum. The writer, then, was some one else, and he had never heard that burglars interrupted their work in order to write letters! It seemed a complicated business.

But what puzzled him most of all was his chum's statement that the shooting was a stupid accident brought about by his own fault. Frankly, Peter declined to believe it. Obviously Jack was shielding some one, but whom? and for what reason? It was plain that his assailant was not an ordinary burglar nor even a stranger.

In the confusion no one had taken particular notice of his neighbours, but now Peter remembered that he had not seen Thompson. Where was he? In bed? The noise must have awakened him. Surely he wasn't such a coward as to be afraid to leave his room! Peter's opinion of Mr. Crofton's pupil was very low, but he gave him the benefit of that doubt. But if not in his room, where was he? That was an interesting question on which the boy was still speculating when the car slowed down and stopped.

"Turn her round," he exclaimed, as he sprang out quickly, "we shan't be a minute or two."

Dr. Pollitt wasted little time in asking questions. He jumped out of bed, dressed quickly, picked up his case of surgical instruments—always kept ready, for accidents were not uncommon in the quarries—and hurried out. It was only after

the car had started that he began to talk.

"Jack shot! How? Who did it? You young rascals playing tricks again? But it's the middle of the night."

"It wasn't anything to do with Carew or me," exclaimed Peter. "The report of the pistol woke us up, and I ran downstairs with Roger. We found Jack in the sanctum. He's pretty bad, I guess."

The doctor whistled softly—a trick of his when greatly surprised. Where is Mr. Crofton?" he asked.

"At Bristol."

"Was Jack conscious?"

"When I left. He told us that the shooting was a stupid accident and his own fault. He had only his pyjamas on," Peter added reflectively.

"Then he had been to bed?"

"Yes, we all went at the same time. It's a rummy show, and I can't make it out."

"Shot with a pistol, I suppose!"

"No one knows. We didn't find any weapon."

"Curious accident, to shoot oneself with a pistol that isn't there," the doctor remarked dryly.

"But it was an accident, Dr. Pollitt," Peter protested, with some warmth, "Jack said so distinctly. He told his mother and Carew."

Though stoutly loyal to his chum, Peter secretly agreed with the doctor that the "accident" was a very peculiar one. He was more than ever convinced that his original opinion was correct—Jack was shielding his assailant. He was always more or less a quixotic ass, Peter thought savagely. Still, it was the proper thing to back him up.

By the time the car arrived at Mount Lydyard a low bed had been moved into the sanctum, Mrs. Crofton had cleansed the wound—the boy had been shot high up near the shoulder—and Jack was lying very still and only half conscious.

Whatever suspicions Dr. Pollitt had, he kept to himself; just at present he was simply a doctor, and all his energies were directed to the welfare of his patient. He complimented Mrs. Crofton on the steps she had taken, and then made a rapid but skilful examination of the wounded boy.

"No cause for alarm," he exclaimed presently, "might have been much worse. The bullet's in a good place, extract it quite easily. You youngsters can clear out, but I'll talk to you later. Now, my dear Mrs. Crofton, if you have a dependable girl in the house we'll have her here and set to work."

Mrs. Crofton, relieved of her one great dread, managed to smile. "Tell Lizzie to come," she said to the boys as they went out.

"Come up to my room," whispered Carew, who was looking very serious, "I want to talk to you."

"Right-o, but you can drop that undertaker's phiz, Jack ain't going to die; old Pollitt admitted as much as that."

Carew made no immediate reply, but when they got upstairs he said, "Did you see those papers on the table?"

Peter nodded. "And the fountain-pen! And the open drawer."

"I 'bundled everything in there and shut the drawer."

"Good for you, old son. Happen to have seen the pen before?"

Carew lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "It's Thompson's," he replied.

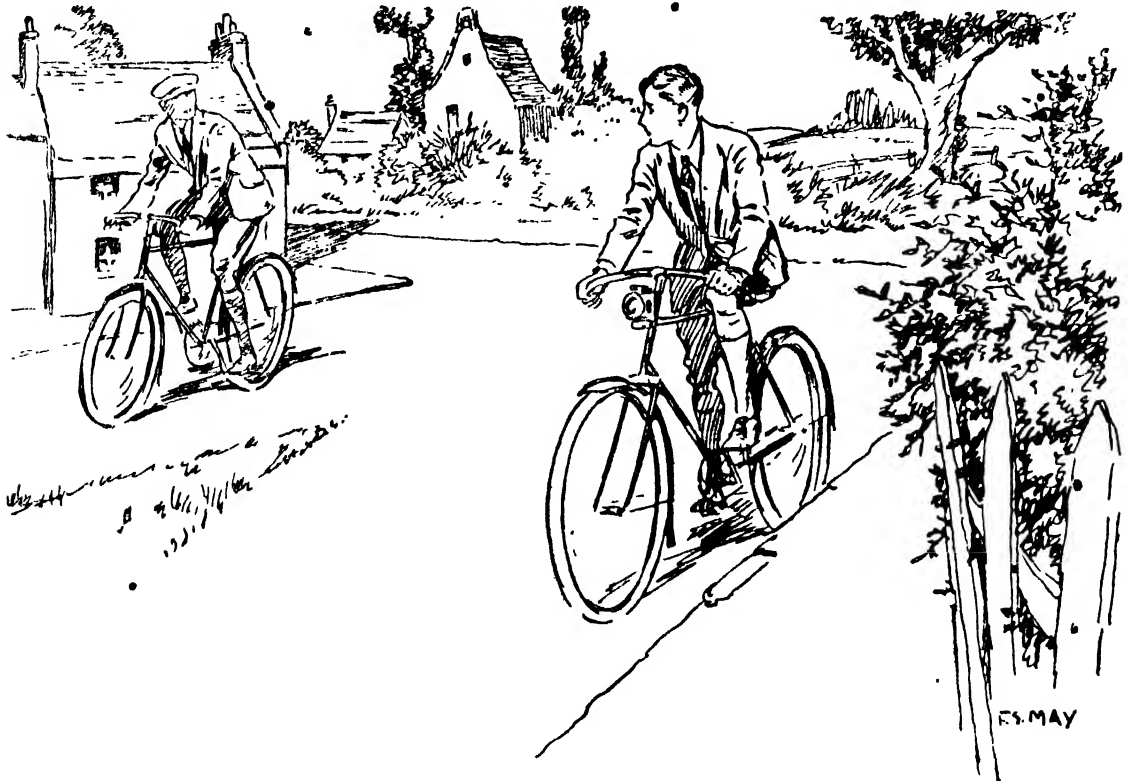
Peter received the startling announcement without any surprise. "Just what I expected, old man, though I couldn't quite twig it myself. Where is the skunk?"

"Bolted! I went into his room; he

can't see underneath the surface, but what's on top seems pretty clear."

"Go on," commanded Peter, "unravel the mystery."

"Shut up, for goodness' sake, and try not to be such a bally idiot. In the first place, Thompson must have waited till



When they separated at the village Carew renewed his warning.

hadn't been to bed nor even lain down on the outside."

"That clears up one part of the show, anyhow—he was the dirty tyke who shot Jack. Even such an ass as Watson could tell that much. But why?"

"Watson couldn't answer that; you'll need to apply to Sherlock Holmes. I

the house was quiet and then sneaked downstairs. What he intended doing I can't guess, so we'll cut that part out. Now, I reckon Jack was still awake—he was pretty excited, you know, about the doings at Exeter."

"That's right," Peter pat in.

"If he heard a suspicious sound he would

naturally get up to investigate. Then he caught Thompson in the den, and there was a struggle. —”

“And an accident,” Peter grinned.

“It’s bound to be an accident if Jack says so.”

“Right you are, old son, but Pollitt sniffed like anything when I told him. And we’ll have the police nosing around soon, old Pennycuik’s bound to butt in somewhere.”

“That’s the trouble. If the silly fool hadn’t lost his head we might have hushed things up, but now there’ll be a regular hue-and-cry after him. I hope he won’t do anything desperate.”

“Drown himself, you mean? No fear, he’s too flabby.”

“If he thinks Jack’s dead he’ll go dotty. We’ve got to find him, Peter, and explain all about the accident before he gives himself away.”

“As likely as not he’ll join the early train to town, and to do that he’ll have to go to Dum Tor. I’ll cycle over and bring him back. You’ll have to get into touch with Mr. Crofton.”

“And afterwards I’ll join you at the junction. But be careful, old man; don’t forget the chap’s sure to be crazy with fear, and he may shoot again.”

“Not much,” Peter declared carelessly; “he’ll be sick at the sight of a pistol. Get the machines ready, will you? while I dress.”

In a short time both boys rode off, and when they separated at the village Carew renewed his warning. “Tell him at once what Jack said,” he advised, “or he’ll think you want to hand him over to the police.”

• “So I would if it wasn’t for Jack,”

growled Peter, “but I’ll remember and talk to him sweetly. Unless he’s an awful mug he’ll be glad to come back quietly.”

Peter travelled by a roundabout route—there was ample time, and less chance of being spotted by the fugitive. “Bound to nab him on the platform,” he thought, “hardly any one will be there. And if he won’t come, I’ll telephone for the police. The dirty beast! I wonder why Jack is keeping mum!”

The puzzle occupied his mind during the whole journey, and at the end he had to confess himself still baffled. Placing his machine behind a coal shed, he crept cautiously into the station and peered eagerly around. The platform was deserted and unlit; the one waiting-room was empty, none of the officials had as yet arrived.

“Guess the bounder won’t turn up till the last minute,” Peter concluded, “and I’ll grab him when he goes to the ticket-office. He isn’t such an almighty fool as to make a fuss here; must know it won’t do any good.”

Having discovered a suitable observation post, Peter began his uninviting vigil. It was a dreary and monotonous business, but his spirits rose when a porter, still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, lumbered in and proceeded to light the lamps. Then Carew appeared, gave a swift glance around and vanished.

“That’s O.K.,” muttered Peter, “one of us is bound to spot him.”

Next the booking-clerk arrived, followed in a few minutes by the station-master, and afterwards three or four intending passengers. Peter scanned them all; he knew every one, and Thompson was not amongst them. He glanced at his watch,

the train was due in five minutes. His excitement grew, the boulder was cutting things very fine. There was the signal! He heard the throb of the engine, and watched with redoubled eagerness as the long train drew up slowly. The new passengers took their seats, the guard blew his whistle, and waved his flag, and the express resumed her interrupted journey. Little time was wasted at Dum Tor!

Peter was frankly surprised and thoroughly disappointed. He had felt perfectly sure that Thompson would take the first opportunity of escaping to London and hiding with his friends. Perhaps he had run cunning, gone in the opposite direction, and boarded a local that passed through Dum Tor without stopping. Anyhow, it was useless staying longer. Very crestfallen, he stole away to pick up his chum, who was almost equally dumbfounded by their ill-success.

"We're a pair of fathheads," said Carew, "we might have guessed he wouldn't risk coming here. Anyway, he's dodged us, and we may as well go back. It's a silly game; every one will know he's bolted, and Pennycook will bore us to death with his questions."

"He can't get much out of us, except that Jack said it was an accident."

"Then Pennycook will want to know why the chap bolted. I'm afraid the men will be fishing his body out of the water."

"Huh!" exclaimed Peter scornfully.

They rode straight to the Mount, Carew insisting that they should not make any inquiries until after their interview with Dr. Pollitt. "Of course it's all bound to come out," he admitted, "but Jack won't

want us to start the hue-and-cry;" with which his chum agreed.

They found the doctor at breakfast and alone, Mrs. Crofton still being in the sick room. "Ought to be jolly hungry after your early morning exercise," he remarked quizzingly, "astonishing what a lot of energy boys possess nowadays. Touch the bell, Roger, and sit down, both of you. I hope cook has a reserve stock of bacon and eggs."

"We can do with plenty," replied Carew cheerfully, "and some hot coffee, the air is pretty keen;" and then, "Have you had any word from Mr. Crofton?"

"No! Why?"

"I got a message through to him, and he promised to start at once by motor, not wait for a train."

"Glad to hear that," said Dr. Pollitt with an accent of relief, "the sooner he gets here the better. He's the only person who can unravel this tangle. I'm going to have a pipe now in the library, perhaps when you have finished breakfast you will join me. There are two or three points I want to clear up."

"Pollitt's taking precious little stock in the accident yarn," remarked Peter, as the doctor departed.

"Oh, don't worry about Pollitt just now. Fried eggs and bacon, hot coffee, and a wolf's appetite, three good things to come together. What!"

"I reckon the doctor will have finished his pipe before we get to him," grinned Peter, as he poured out the coffee. "No milk for you? Right-o. My aunt, that bacon smells good."

"And tastes good," said Carew, beginning his breakfast.

CHAPTER VI

INSPECTOR PENNYCUIK

DR. POLLITT tapped the ashes from his pipe as the boys entered, methodically adjusted a rubber cap over the bowl, and replaced the pipe in his pocket.

"Now," he began, when they were both seated, "I should like to learn the ins and outs of this amazing business. But first of all, are you aware that Thompson isn't in the house?"

"Yes," replied Carew, "I went to his room and found that he hadn't been to bed."

"Where is he now?"

"Seems to have vanished; we thought he might make for London; and we cycled over to Dum Tor to meet the train, but he wasn't there."

"I should imagine not," exclaimed the doctor significantly. "I suppose we may take it for granted that it is through him Jack met with his peculiar accident."

"That's our opinion, but there really isn't any proof. Jack only told us to be sure to remember it was an accident."

"Well, he is too weak to be questioned, which is perhaps fortunate, because naturally I shall have to report the affair to the police, and PennyCUIK won't be long before discovering that one person is missing. Very stupid of Thompson, exceedingly stupid; his disappearance will set all the tongues wagging."

"The chap will be frightened out of his wits," said Carew; "I hope he won't do anything rash."

Peter, as usual, was prepared to scoff, but Dr. Pollitt surprised him by saying, "It

isn't at all unlikely; his nerves are badly strung, and he has had a big shock. A person of his temperament is easily unhinged. He may, probably will, think Jack is dead, and perhaps accuse himself of killing him. In that case anything may happen."

"His bolting will make talk and set the police on his track," Carew remarked.

"We can't keep the police out of it, my boy, and if we try they will instantly smell a rat. My plan is the only prudent one. I shall approach PennyCUIK, make my report, and leave the case in his hands."

"But when they've caught the silly owl they'll put him in prison."

"Why? The affair is quite simple and straightforward. Here are two silly fellows fooling about with a pistol, when it goes off suddenly. One gets hurt, and the other loses his head and runs away. A very weak and silly proceeding, but not criminal. There may be trouble about the registration, but that's a minor matter, and what we believe has nothing to do with any one. Jack is the only person in possession of the actual truth. Naturally, it will be so much to the good if you two light on the runaway first, you can explain about the accident; it may surprise him," and the speaker finished with a laugh.

"We had better make a start at once," exclaimed Peter, jumping up.

"Try the most unlikely places first," Dr. Pollitt advised; "the police will make inquiries at the garages and railway-stations. Now I'm off to interview PennyCUIK. I shall look in again presently, though Jack is going on nicely."

"I'll tell Jennings to get the car out," said Carew; "it will save time."

Now Dr. Pollitt did not believe a word



The inspector smiled indulgently.

of the story he intended telling the inspector. Though at a loss to account for the motive, he felt convinced that the runaway had deliberately shot young Crofton. Everything pointed to that conclusion—the time, the place, and the hurried flight. There had been dirty work of some sort which the victim had interrupted. Its precise character was known only to the two principals, and probably Mr. Crofton, but that did not signify in any way. Since young Crofton desired to present the affair as an unlucky accident, an accident it must be, unless the boy's father decided otherwise.

Inspector Pennycuik was obviously disappointed by the doctor's story. It was

rarely that anything of unusual importance happened in the district, or that he was afforded a chance of distinguishing himself. And here was a case which, with any kind of luck, might have figured as attempted murder or even, if the youngster died, murder. There would have been Press interviews, photographs of the Mount, his own photograph, paragraphs explaining that, although the police were extremely reticent, they had the matter well in hand and were confident of capturing the miscreant in an incredibly short space of time. He felt vaguely that Dr. Pollitt with his miserable accident had defrauded him.

He brightened up a little when his

visitor touched on Thompson's disappearance. "He's just a bundle of nerves," the doctor explained, "and the accident bowled him over. He was frightened to death and lost his head completely. Probably expected you to come along and string him up then and there; these foreigners have curious notions. But I'm sure you will do your best to get him back for us."

The inspector buzzed pleasantly. Though not the genuine article, this was better than nothing. There would be ample scope for the local press; even the big dailies might be attracted. Already he saw in his mind's eye imposing headlines: "Mysterious tragedy at Mount Lydyard! Was it an accident? Inspector Pennycuik makes a move."

"All right, doctor," he exclaimed genially, "I won't waste any time; my men will soon round him up. A very simple job."

"To you," replied his visitor politely, "but not to outsiders; we are always left marvelling how it is done."

The inspector smiled indulgently. "You flatter us, doctor," he said; "we owe everything to perfect organisation, that's our one secret. And now if you will write out a description of this foreigner! I suppose they will have a photo at the Mount?"

"They may, but I scarcely think it likely."

The inspector was ruffled. "One should always have photos," he remarked severely, "always; photos make things a lot easier for us."

"You can make inquiries," the doctor observed with an inward chuckle—he was not devoid of humour—"but by the way,

young Crofton mustn't be disturbed, any excitement just now will be highly prejudicial to his chance of recovery."

"That's very awkward," grumbled the inspector; "how soon can I see him?"

"Depends on how he progresses; not for two or three days at the earliest, but I'll send word the instant he is strong enough to receive you."

The instant Dr. Pollitt, satisfied with the result of his errand, had gone, the inspector issued his orders, and phoned to all the railway and police stations in the district. Then he went to the Mount. Mrs. Crofton was still in attendance on Jack; Carew and his chum had not returned, but he proceeded to question the servants, who were quite ready and willing to give him all the information they possessed.

Their account, though sketchy and incomplete, was sufficient to set the inspector wondering. To say the least, this accident, concerning which Dr. Pollitt had talked so confidently, seemed a very strange one, and he resolved to pay another visit in the evening when the two boys had returned. By that time, too, Mr. Crofton would be home.

Peter and Carew returned tired out physically and depressed in spirits. With the assistance of several fishermen they had spent the day in exploring the coast, but to no purpose; Thompson had vanished, and apparently without leaving a trace. They found Mr. Crofton waiting for them eagerly; his wife was able to explain little of what had happened, while Jack was, of course, too weak to be questioned.

He listened quietly as Carew narrated the different incidents of the story—Thompson's interview with the stranger on

the private road, the anonymous letter, and the episode of the Blue Lion at Exeter. Jack's father did not interrupt, though it was plain that he was greatly interested, especially when Carew spoke of the opened drawer, and the pen and papers on the table.

"I thought it best to say nothing to Mrs. Crofton," he concluded, "so I just pushed all the things into the drawer."

"Quite right, Roger," exclaimed his host approvingly; "the fountain pen, I suppose, belonged to Thompson!"

"Yes, sir."

"And according to Jack, the shooting was an accident."

"Yes, sir, he seemed particularly anxious to make us understand that."

"Inspector Pennycuik will wish to question you. I haven't seen him, but he left word that he will be here this evening. There is the bell now," and after a minute or two a servant ushered the inspector into the room.

He shook hands with Mr. Crofton. "Sorry to hear about this unfortunate affair," he said. "I trust the boy is going on favourably."

"Pollitt assures me there is little danger if he is kept free from excitement."

"Just so. Clever man, Pollitt, very. A pity your pupil should have lost his head. We have no word of him yet, and he doesn't seem to have gone by train or any public conveyance. Was he likely to be in funds?"

"He would have a little money."

"That's important, you know; one can do things with money. It's a queer business altogether. Pollitt told me as much as he knew, but that wasn't much, while the servants got the story into a hopeless

tangle. But perhaps these young gentlemen can help me."

"We know really very little about it," replied Carew. "An' hour or so after going to bed I heard what sounded like a pistol shot, so I jumped up, called Shaw, and ran downstairs. Jack was lying under the table in the den."

"Were there any marks of a struggle?"

"Oh, no, none at all."

"And you did not find the weapon?"

"No," said Carew.

"Master Crofton was conscious?"

"When we got there, yes, though he went off afterwards."

"I understand he was able to speak a little. Can you remember just what he said?"

"Perfectly well. His actual words were, 'Pure accident, all my fault.'"

"One more question," the inspector continued. "It sounds silly, but it is important in a case of this sort. Was there any cause for ill-feeling between your friend and Thompson?"

"No," replied Carew, "we were all on good terms with him, although he wasn't often with us. He didn't care much for our sports. But there was never anything to quarrel over."

"Thank you," said the inspector pleasantly. "Now, I must be going, but I hope to report some satisfactory information before long."

"I trust you will obtain tidings of the lad quickly," Mr. Crofton remarked, bidding his visitor farewell.

Inspector Pennycuik looked very serious as he stepped into his car. The doctor's story had made him slightly suspicious, but now his suspicion hardened into certainty. For some unknown reason Jack

Crofton had been shot by his father's pupil, and the family at the Mount were endeavouring to hush the matter up. The idea of being fooled acted as a sharp spur, and he resolved to bend all his energies to the task of capturing the fugitive. The law might be an ass, but Inspector Penny-cuik would make it plain that its officers were not altogether dolts.

Meanwhile, Mr. Crofton had sent the boys to bed, suggesting they should resume their search as soon as day broke. Then he returned to the sanctum where Jack lay tended by his mother, and, without drawing attention to his movements, examined the contents of the opened drawer. His face exhibited surprise, almost incredulity, but in a moment he had his features under control, and crossed to the bedside.

"You must have a nurse, my dear," he said softly.

Mrs. Crofton glanced at her watch. "Dr. Pollitt will be here in a few minutes," she replied, "he is bringing one. But I cannot understand how this happened. Have you heard any news of Thompson?"

"Not yet, but the police are scouring the country; he must be found very soon."

"But what could Jack have been doing down here? It all seems very mysterious."

"We must wait for the explanation until Jack is a little stronger; no doubt the seeming puzzle is very simple. There is Pollitt in the hall; he has brought the nurse with him."

The doctor's first act was to order Mrs. Crofton to bed. His patient was progressing nicely, and there was no need for alarm. Mrs. Bulac was a woman of experience, capable of taking entire charge. He himself would look in the first thing in

the morning, though the visit was really unnecessary. His tone was cheery and confident, and at last Mrs. Crofton was persuaded to go to her own room. Then he examined the patient, issued his instructions to the nurse, and followed Mr. Crofton to the library.

"There's really no danger," he exclaimed breezily; "all he needs is quiet and good nursing."

Mr. Crofton accepted the assurance, "Penny-cuik's been here asking questions," he said.

"Ah," commented the doctor, "trying to work up a case. He's a suspicious chap, and full of zeal. And, mind you, this accident theory is a big bite to swallow. Though," reflectively, "I can't imagine what motive the other fellow could have for shooting."

"There is no fresh news in the village, I suppose?"

"None; the police have drawn blank everywhere. The fugitive is either very cunning, or——" and he finished with a significant gesture.

"I hope it isn't as bad as that," said Mr. Crofton, "but I'm beginning to feel a little afraid."

CHAPTER VII

MR. CROFTON EXPLAINS

THE two chums trudged back despondently to where they had left their machines. Since early morning they had ridden and searched in the endeavour to obtain tidings of the fugitive. Their efforts had resulted in blank failure; no one in the neighbouring

hamlets and villages had seen or heard of him, and the boys, though with keen reluctance, decided to abandon the search for the day. They were tired out, hungry, and thirsty—but especially thirsty, for the sun's rays had been scorching.

a mile out of our way and the ground's all bumps. We had a day's fishing there a week or two ago." •

"I remember," grinned Peter; "I didn't want to sit down for hours after getting back. But the drink's worth it,



"Dead!" exclaimed Carew in a whisper, "poor beggar!"

"Sure there isn't a drop left," said Peter wistfully.

Carew took out his thermos flask and held it upside down. "Dry as the proverbial bone," he replied.

"I must get a drink somehow, my throat's like a lime-kiln."

"There's a spring near the tarn, but it's

and you can fill the flask again. Come along, old son."

"May as well push on," grumbled Carew, "we'll be home the sooner," but after a while he yielded and mounted his cycle.

They were on the fringe of a wide moorland, and he had truthfully described the.

ground as all bumps, but Peter was willing to undergo the discomfort for the sake of a drink.

"If we had found the chap, or any trace of him, I wouldn't mind," he grumbled, "but we've wasted our time for nothing. And very likely, while we've been fooling around here, old Pennycuik's picked him up!"

His chum declined to agree. "If he had bolted by any of the recognised routes the police would have nabbed him before we started this morning," he objected; "No, I still believe the poor beggar has passed out."

"You're a great hand at croaking, old son," cried Peter flippantly; "if it's one of the subjects at coll. you'll get a first easily. Huh, that was a nasty jar."

Carew received the chaff good-humouredly. "There's the spring," he remarked; "go steady and don't guzzle, or we shall be having you down with fever."

"Oh, wise mentor;" Peter grinned, as he jumped off, "if you only had gray hairs and a beard now."

Each took a refreshing drink, Carew filled the flask, and they prepared to start on the homeward journey.

"Keep down near the lake," Peter counselled, "the going's smoother, and besides we'll strike that track the natives call a road."

His chum nodded. "I remember, it takes us to Buxley."

They had reached a passable track near the reeds and rushes that overhung the margin of the lake, when Peter stopped with such abruptness that he was nearly thrown from his machine. His eyes shone

with excitement as he stretched out his arm—surprise deprived him of speech. Carew looked in the direction and promptly stopped. They fixed up the cycles, and walked in awed silence to the object which Peter's sharp sight had detected. The search was over, they had discovered the fugitive. He lay face downwards, his head resting on his hands, his body ominously still.

"Dead!" exclaimed Carew in a whisper, "poor beggar!"

"We'd better make sure," said Peter quaveringly—it was a nasty job to tackle; "run back for that flask of brandy in case it's of use."

Peter bent closely over the body, Thompson never stirred. They managed to turn him on to his back; his white face was pinched and drawn, his staring eyes showed no flicker of life.

Carew slipped one hand inside the shirt and placed it on the heart, keeping it there fully a minute. "Rub his lips with the brandy," he said, "and try to get some between his teeth. I believe he's alive, the heart's beating. Hefe, I'll help you."

Between them they succeeded in forcing a little of the spirit into his mouth, but, as far as appearance went, it produced no effect.

"Wish we had joined the ambulance class," exclaimed Carew regretfully, "I'm a juggins at this game. Perhaps we ought to chafe his hands."

"One of us must fetch Pollitt," declared Peter with decision.

"And Mr. Crofton. Tell them to bring the covered car. And mum to old Pennycuik if you meet him. Mr. Crofton wants to keep the police out of it."

"Right-o, old son! Hate to leave you, but-----"

"That's all right, I'll manage. Never mind the speed limit as soon as you reach a decent bit of road. But slow down when you get to the village."

Peter was a skilful and daring rider, and he had need of all his skill and pluck on that mad ride home. Sometimes he came within an ace of a bad smash, but his luck held, and he reached the doctor's house without mishap.

"Tell Mr. Crofton I'm starting now on foot," Dr. Pollitt said, when the boy briefly told his story; "he can pick me up, no need to set tongues wagging just now."

At the Mount, Peter staggered off his machine and lurched heavily into the house. Happily Mr. Crofton was there, and he forced the boy to drink a glass of wine and to lie down on a couch.

"We've found him," Peter gasped, "by the side of the tarn, past Buxley. Roger thinks he's alive. He says, take the covered car. Pick up Dr. Pollitt, he's gone on. And, oh, please, mayn't I come?"

Mr. Crofton shook his head. "You're all out, Peter, lie there and rest. There's nothing more you can do. And there won't be room in the car coming back."

"I didn't think of that," said the boy. With all his restless energy he scarcely relished the idea of following the motor to and from the tarn.

For half an hour or so he lay wondering at what would happen. Roger had declared the runaway to be still alive, but he himself had detected no sign of life. But suppose he was alive? What then? What would Pennycuik do? Had he

any power to put the chap in prison? Perhaps it was just as well that the police hadn't visited the tarn first! He got up and walked about restlessly. This waiting was horribly tedious and seemed everlasting. Mr. Crofton ought to be back by now. Was that the sound of an engine? No. The chauffeur must be crawling like a snail.

He wandered from one part of the building to another. Acting on their master's instructions, the servants were getting everything ready, and Jack's nurse had left the sick room to superintend. She was a cheery soul, and the sight of her pleasant face did the boy a world of good.

"How's Jack getting on?" he asked her.

"Famously," she replied, "there's no need for any one to worry about him. Ah, there's the car," and she hastened to get hot blankets in which to wrap Thompson.

Mr. Crofton and the doctor carried their burden along the passage and up the staircase, Mrs. Bulac going in front. The men's faces were grave, and Peter was afraid to put the question which rose to his lips. He went to the outer door and waited the arrival of his chum.

Carew looked grave too. "He was breathing when they lifted him into the car," he said, "but Pollitt didn't seem hopeful. I guess the poor beggar has been without food for the last two days."

"Did he say anything?"

"No, he isn't conscious. He's just been wandering around any fashion till he broke down. If he wasn't crazy then, he is now."

"Jack's going on all right."

"Good. Did you meet Pennycuik?"

"No, nor any of his men. It doesn't.

matter, though; Pollitt won't let them touch him."

"Not much," his chum agreed.

It was very late when the doctor came down, but he stopped a moment to speak to them. "You youngsters would be better in bed," he exclaimed briskly; "no sense in moping about here. You can't do any good, nor any one else for that matter."

"Is Thompson going to die?" Carew asked.

"No one can answer that question. He's had a big shock and there isn't much reserve strength to fall back on."

"Inspector Pennycuik can't touch him, can he?" asked Peter.

"Of course not. He's too ill to be seen, for one thing; and for another, there's no charge against him. I'm going to call on the inspector now. And you toddle off to bed, or I shall be having a ready-made hospital here."

"What about the pistol?" Peter inquired anxiously, as he and his chum went upstairs together.

"Must have thrown it away," replied Carew; "I searched his pockets before the car arrived, and it wasn't there."

"Ripping," said Peter, "that knocks old Pennycuik clean off his perch. But it's a rummy business," and wishing Carew good-night, he went to his own room.

Next morning Thompson was still alive though not much more; but, on the other hand, Mrs. Bulac's report of Jack was distinctly rosy and encouraging. He had slept naturally for several hours, was perfectly sensible, and capable of taking a fair amount of nourishment. In a day or two, unless he had a relapse, his chums would be able to visit him.

"Not to badger him with questions,

though," she added; "and mind, he has heard nothing of the young gentleman upstairs."

"Trust us, nurse; we won't chatter," Carew assured her.

They were agreeably surprised by the first sight of their chum. His face was pale, and he was obviously weak, but he smiled almost in the old way, and his eyes were lit by the glow of returning health.

When, in obedience to the nurse's signal, they wished him good-bye, he beckoned Carew closer. "Did you tell 'em it was an accident and my own fault?" he whispered, and when Carew nodded, he smiled happily.

"Seems awfully keen on that point," said Carew, "but he'll have all his work cut out to make Pennycuik believe it."

The subject was not mentioned by Mr. Crofton, who spent a good deal of time in Thompson's room. Dr. Pollitt came at least once, but usually twice every day, and his face was always grave. His patient, though conscious now, gave no sign of recovery. He never spoke, but lay hour after hour with his eyes closed and his body motionless.

"He doesn't help us a bit," the doctor grumbled one morning, "I don't believe he has the will to live."

"No," Mr. Crofton agreed, "he shows no interest in anything. I told him Jack wasn't seriously hurt, and that the shooting was an accident and his own fault, but he paid little attention."

The doctor shook his head. "If that won't rouse him nothing will," he declared.

Nothing apparently would rouse him; the days dragged wearily by and brought no noticeable change except that of ever increasing weakness. And at the end of

a week it was obvious that Mr. Croftor's pupil was slowly but inevitably dying.

Jack was sitting up a little while every afternoon now, and when he began to ask after Thompson his mother thought it the wiser course to let him know the truth.

"Poor beggar, I'm sorry for him," said Jack quietly, "he was just crazy; clean off his head."

No one asked him any questions and he offered no further remark, but sat a long while living over the events of that tragic night, and trying, though unsuccessfully, to puzzle out their meaning.

Like his chums, he was still wondering over the unexplained mystery, when, a couple of days later, Thompson died. The three boys were chatting in the sanctum, when Mr. Crofton brought them the news.

"It is a very sad story," he said, "and one which I would prefer to keep to myself, but on the whole I consider it better that you should know the truth. There is no need to tell any one else, except Dr. Pollitt, and what I say is to go no farther."

"We understand that, sir," said Carew.

"No doubt Jack has told you that I do an extensive trade with the east of Europe. You cannot understand the details of the business, but I buy and sell extensively, and large sums of money are often made and lost on the deals. As you know, this young man is the son of an old friend. Unhappily he had already made one or two serious errors in life, which had placed him in the power of unscrupulous men. Learning that he was coming to me, they resolved to make use of him for their own purpose."

"The poor fellow, frightened by their threat to expose his secret, reluctantly consented to help them. By obtaining a knowledge of my plans, they could so arrange matters, as to make high profits for themselves. Naturally I had no suspicion of the truth, and several times Thompson was able to send them secret information. That is what took me to town so frequently."

Mr. Crofton paused a moment and then continued, "Success made them bolder, and they determined to get hold of the secret code in which I communicate with my agents. Thompson was to copy it out. I honestly believe he had no wish to do it——"

"I'm sure of that," Jack interrupted.

"But he was afraid, and yielded. He put them off from time to time, but on the day I went to Bristol they resolved to wait no longer. They supplied him with master keys with which he unlocked the door and the drawers of the desk. When Jack appeared so unexpectedly he lost his head entirely and fired at him."

"Hardly that," remarked Jack, "he just fired. The poor chap was crazy with fear. That's why I told Roger and Peter it was an accident. I didn't want him put in prison."

"Well, it's all over now," Mr. Crofton concluded, "and I don't want you to discuss it even amongst yourselves. I don't believe Thompson was bad or vicious, but just weak. He had got into a mess and hadn't the courage to pull himself out. He isn't the only one by a long way, and the most charitable thing is to forget all about his unhappy mistakes."

Making a Pedal-Driven Motor-Car

By F. J. CAMM

THE desire to propel ourselves by methods other than walking, attacks most of us at an early age. Almost one of the first things for which we wish is a bicycle, tricycle, hobby horse, or scooter. Devices for this purpose had their inception in the velocipede or "dandy horse" of the early 'sixties, and once it had been demonstrated that man could efficiently propel himself by means of the contact of his feet with the road, a succession of improvements for "manumotives," as they were then called, soon followed—notably the geared chain and pedal drive, and the rubber tyre.

Nowadays the pedal-drive principle is adapted to two and four-wheeled vehicles intended for children, and it is the purpose of this article to describe and illustrate the construction of two types of four-wheeler

—a simple pedal-driven motor two-seater car, and also a hand-propelled single seater. Fig. 1 shows the finished car in side elevation.

The Chassis.—For the chassis use a piece of ash or other hardwood $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick, 4 feet $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, and 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. Cut it to the shape shown in Fig. 2, and in the position shown cut a square hole of 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches side, to enable the feet to work the pedals. It will be noted in Fig. 2 that a piece of iron bar 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch wide, and $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch thick is bolted across this opening to carry the chain-wheel and pedals. If a metal-cutting drill and brace are not available, the local ironmonger would supply the bar, drilled ready for the bolts, for a few pence. Fig. 3 shows how the pedals and chain-wheel are supported by this bar.

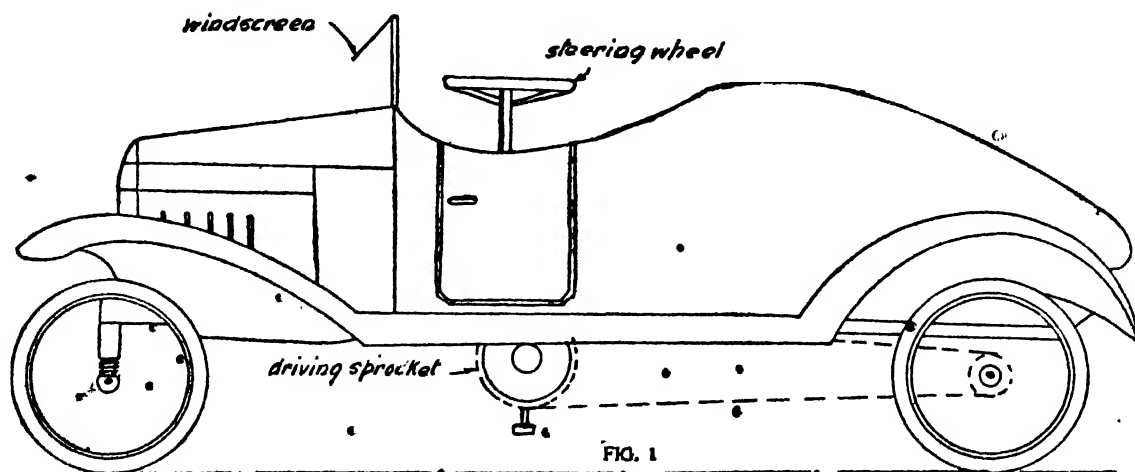


FIG. 1

Outline of Pedal Motor-Car.

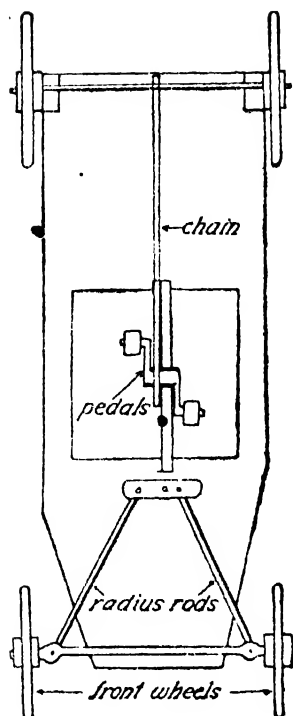


FIG. 2

Undercarriage.

the wheels to be steered, a piece of brass tubing should be forced into a hole drilled in the chassis to contain this steering bolt, otherwise in a short time the bolt would wear the hole in the wood oval.

To render the front part more rigid, two $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pins are screwed into the spring and project sufficiently to pass into slots cut in the wood. These pins also act as stops for the steering (see Fig. 2).

Steering Details.—The steering rods are attached to two pins ($\frac{1}{4}$ -inch diameter) which are secured to the flattened-out ends of the square axle. A piece of round steel, with a thick steel washer drilled and pinned on it to form a collar, is used for the steering column or spindle.

The Wheels and Axles.—The front wheels are 12 inches and the rear ones 15 inches in diameter, the front ones revolving on a stationary axle, and the rear ones being fixed to the axle so that the latter revolves with them. This explains the meaning of the terms "live" and "dead" axles.

The front axle is fixed securely in the spring support by a bolt, the spring itself being attached to the chassis by a $\frac{7}{16}$ -inch bolt, tightened just sufficiently to allow

A bracket to carry the steering spindle will next be required. It may be fashioned from bar iron about $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch \times $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch, and fixed with small bolts to the chassis. Where the spindle passes through, the bracket is enlarged to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and a hole is drilled to take a piece of brass tubing, which acts as a bearing for the spindle. The tubular bush itself should be cut about $1\frac{3}{16}$ inches long, and should be screwed into the iron support, which is tapped to receive it, as shown in the diagram. The position of the steering column is fixed by a sliding collar bearing against the bush; this collar must be drilled and tapped to receive a set screw so that it may be locked to the column when the correct position (consistent with easy steering) has been found (see Fig. 4).

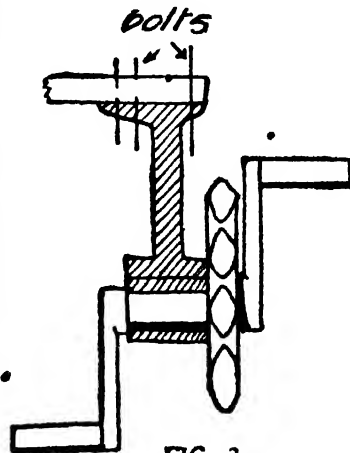


FIG. 3

Pedal Bracket.

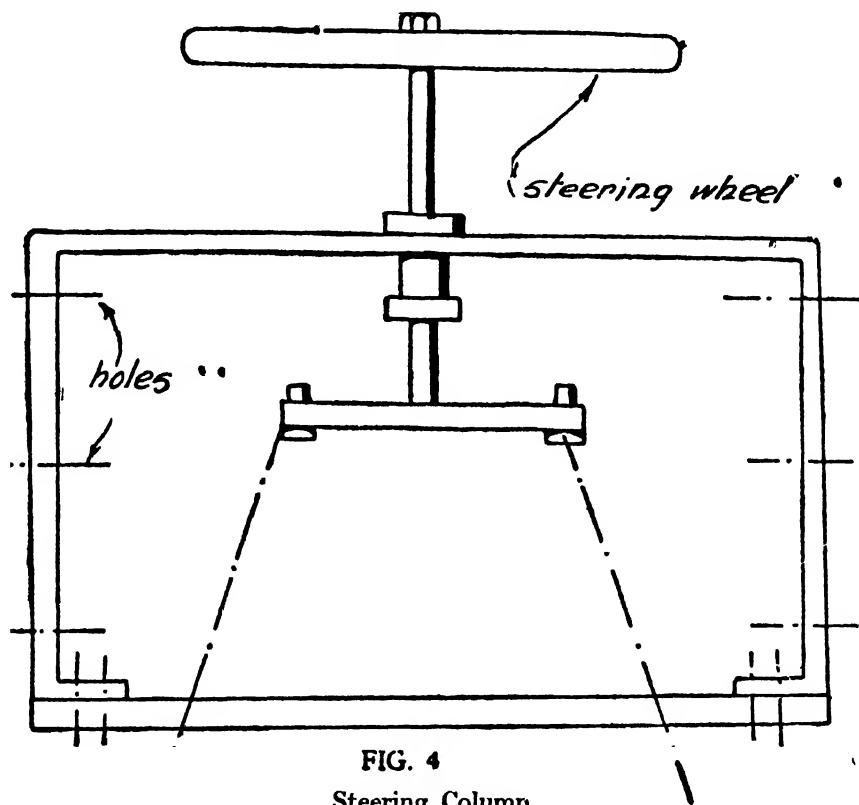
The Driving Mechanism.—The pedals and chain-wheel can be obtained cheaply from the local cycle repairer, or from the address given later on, so that all that remains to be dealt with under this heading is the method of fixing the driving mechanism to the vehicle.

Any suitable bracket or lug from the scrapheap of the cycle repairer will suit, so that the pedal, etc., may be mounted as shown in Fig. 8.

The Bodywork.—Fig. 1 shows quite a pleasing outline, but there is no need strictly to follow it. In any case it will be necessary to draw the sides full-size on paper and then transfer the pattern to the body-covering material. Very thin three-ply, as used for tea-boxes, is admir-

may be used instead of three-ply, and a more finished appearance obtained.

The Seat.—A kind of small chair is made for this, or a cycle saddle may be mounted on a piece of tube which in turn is bolted to the floor of the car. If the chair idea is adopted, a soft upholstered cushion should



ably suited for the purpose, for it is extremely pliable yet strong, and the body curves can easily be formed.

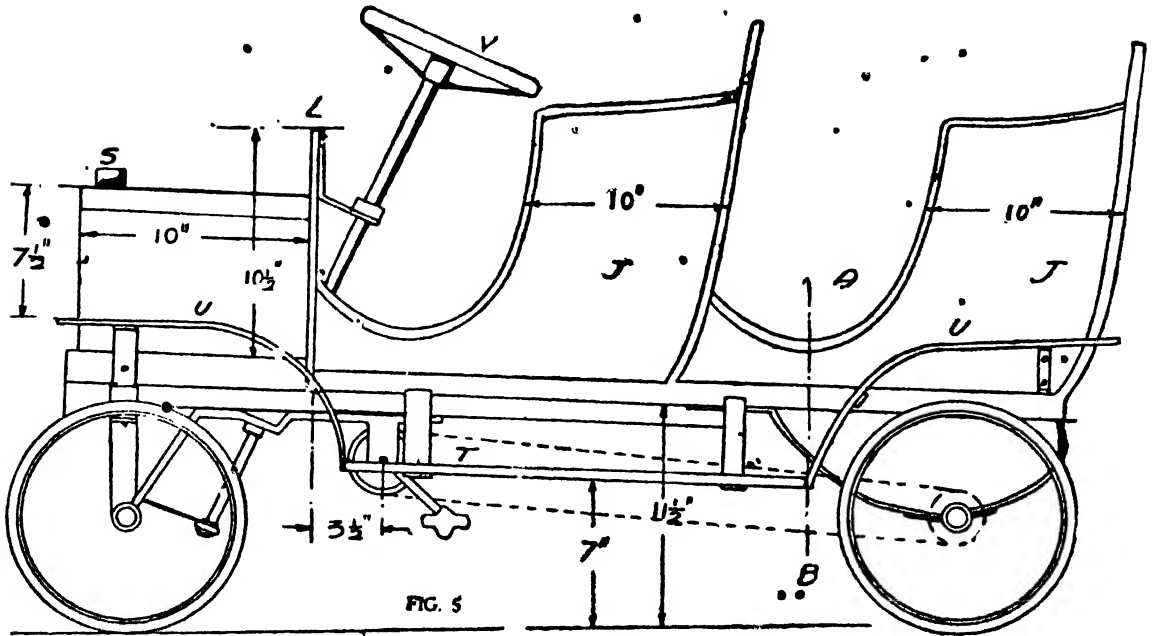
Angle-iron is used to secure the sides and ends to the chassis, and the angle-brackets are screwed to the base for this purpose.

A strip of moulding should be neatly pinned over all exposed joints. With regard to the bonnet, a piece of aluminium

may be made from American cloth and stuffed with horse-hair or mill fluff.

A piece of mica (obtainable from any ironmonger or electrician) should be cut and mounted in a suitable frame, and secured to the bonnet to act as a wind-screen.

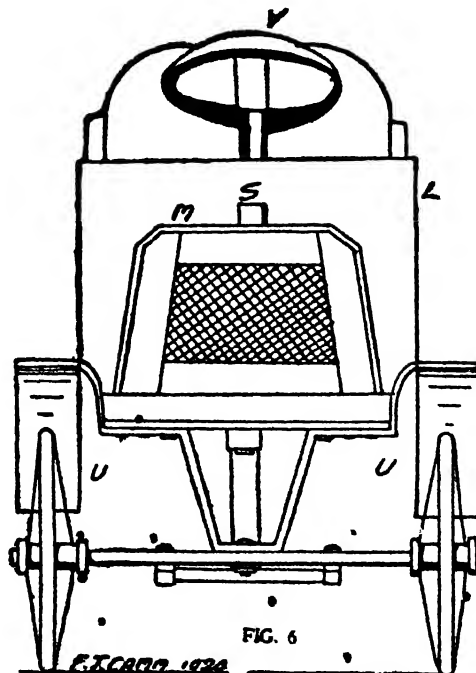
Finishing, Painting, etc.—The painting of the car is dealt with after the construction



of the two-seater, pedal-driven car, which now claims our attention.

TWO-SEATER PEDAL-DRIVEN CAR

Figs. 5 and 6 show a more elaborate pedal-driven car which will seat two persons. It will be seen that it has running boards and wings, and is suitable for children about ten years of age. There is really little need, in view of the detailed illustrations,



to go deeply into the matter of construction, for the illustrations themselves are self-explanatory, especially when the construction of the car already dealt with is borne in mind. One or two points, however, need emphasis. It will be seen that the vehicle has been made as short as possible from the point of view of storage space. This will, of course, limit the locking angle of the front wheel, and will render necessary the fitting of a buffer to

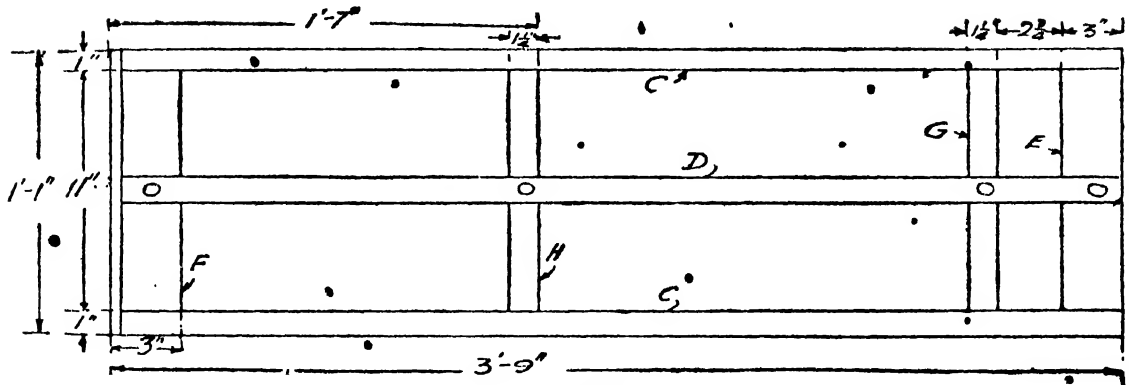


FIG. 8

Bottom Frame.

to the rider. The seat is removed by first raising the back edge. Three adjustments may be made.

Soft pine $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide and $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch thick are used for the other two battens, which are half-lapped together, and are fixed to the side panels by means of glue and screws. These laps should extend into the bottom frame to provide a more solid bed for the panel.

The irons carrying the running board are secured by means of screws to the back of the panel, and this will necessitate cutting accommodating notches in the bottom frame, the irons themselves being about 1 inch by $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch section. Side panels are so arranged that their securing screws pass into each batten. The back panels present more difficulty. These will require bending, and this must carefully be done by damping one side with water and heating the other side. They are then secured to the rebates in the batten with panel pins or small-headed nails.

The Rear Bottom Boards.—We now come to the rear bottom boards, which are cut from pine about $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch thick, arranged with the grain running crosswise. It will be

noted that the front of the rear seat is about $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch higher in front than at the back; nails secure it to the two rails which are attached to the battens.

The Front Seat, etc.—With regard to the front seat it will be seen that this has

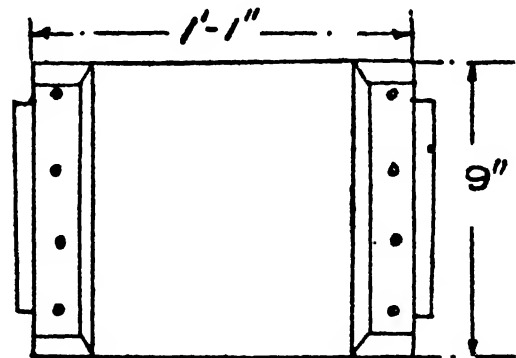


FIG. 9

Front Seat.

a different inclination to render easier the operation of pedalling. This will be clear from Fig. 9, whilst Fig. 10 provides all the necessary dimensions for the dashboard; it is a rear view. The front of the bonnet is arranged in the form of a radiator.

frame, and it is built up from four pieces, of pine about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide half-jointed together; the depth and width is $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch less than the dash opening. $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch boards (thin 3-ply serves well for this purpose) are used to cover the bonnet, and they are fixed to the dash and radiator frame.

The Radiator.—In order to simulate the usual form of radiator, the back of its frame should be covered with a piece of "zinc perforation," which may be obtained from any ironmonger. To render the imitation complete a block of wood as shown in Fig. 6 should be fixed to represent the filler cap.

Assembling.—Now place the dash-board and bonnet in position, fix the radiator frame to the front rail with screws and fix the dash-board to the side panels. It is optional whether mouldings are fitted or whether such may merely be imitated by a deeper shade of paint. This, of course, is a matter of taste.

The Running Boards.—Pine is used for the running boards, 1 foot 9 inches long by 8 inches by $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch, and they are secured to the irons already detailed. The wings are cut from $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch material, 8 inches wide, and are carried by two irons. They are further secured to the running board.

The Wheels.—The wheels are 10 inches in diameter, and are rubber-tyred. These may be obtained complete with axles from the South London Wheel Works, 68, New Kent Road, London, S.E. 1.

The Steering Wheel.—The steering wheel may be made in any convenient manner, but for strength two boards should be used

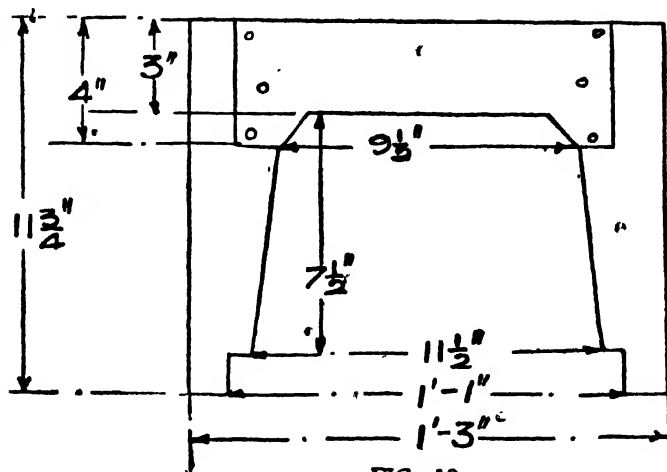


FIG. 40

Dashboard.

$\frac{1}{2}$ -inch in thickness, glued together with the grain running at right angles a square hole is cut in the centre to fit on a similar square on the steering column.

Finishing.—The woodwork should first be rough glasspapered down, first cutting across the grain and finishing with the grain. This process should be repeated with finer grades of glasspaper until a smooth surface is obtained. Then give a coat of lead colour, and when this is dry rub it down with coarse glasspaper, which will provide a key for the next coat of lead colour. This second coat should be rubbed down with fine glasspaper and a following coat given of the desired tint. This should be a flat colour mixed with gold size. When thoroughly dry, fine glasspaper down and give a coat of varnish. A pleasing contrast can be obtained if the wings and mudguards are painted and varnished black and the edges similarly finished to imitate moulding. The inside of the body should be painted red.



GINGER'S TALISMAN

*Alastair
Kennedy*

CHAPTER I

A STRANGE YARN

IT was the first evening of the new term. The joys of the Christmas festivities were already becoming a dim memory, though several boys in the Lower Fourth common-room were endeavouring to make them live again, and one heard a good deal about pantos and pictures and charades, and gorgeous spreads and late nights and many other matters that go to make a schoolboy's holiday.

Master James Springfield, whom every one, from an exaggerated notion concerning the colour of his hair, nicknamed Ginger, showed no interest in this puerile conversation. Like a really great man he sat apart in silent contemplation, and frowned heavily when Marrables asked if he had been to Hengler's.

"Oh, go away," he exclaimed; "can't you see I'm thinking?"

"Here, you chaps, come and look at Ginger, he's thinking! What've you got there?"

Perhaps Ginger had been angling for this particular question, perhaps not; one never could tell. In any case he made to slip something into his pocket, but Marrables was too quick for him, and Ginger reluctantly exhibited the object at which he had been dreamily gazing. Many boys would have said without a moment's hesitation that it was a glass marble of unusual size and curious markings, and have prized it as such, but Ginger was not that kind of person. He had no use for glass marbles.

"Don't touch it," he warned the other boy nervously and in an excited tone that aroused attention; "it's a talisman."

"A what?" scoffingly; "it's just a glass marble."

"It's a beauty though," said Tedder, who had come across with a bunch of fellows, "I'll swop my two-bladed knife for it," and he produced that article, which in point of fact contained two half-blades with saw-like edges. Tedder's knife was well known at Temperley, and had been vainly offered in exchange for all

sorts of things, from a hank of twine to a cricket-ball.

The owner of the talisman gave him a pitying look and shrugged his shoulders expressively. Ginger possessed a vivid imagination, and now he had also an eager audience, two things that go well together. There was, too, something odd in his manner, altogether unlike the care-free, rollicking, happy-go-lucky Ginger familiar to the Lower Fourth. He seemed uneasy, and, if one could have associated fear with him, half afraid. For a time he even refused to answer any questions, said he was sorry they had seen the thing, and he didn't want to talk about it. However, they persevered, and when at length the yarn came, they voted it had been worth waiting for.

Ginger told the tale very modestly—and modesty, as a rule, was not his strongest point—but from what he left out, it was plain that he had shared very prominently in a startling and dramatic adventure. A keen critic would probably have picked various holes in the story, but the Lower Fourth were not too critical, and the several parts hung together in a fairly satisfactory manner.

For one thing the yarn started with a solid fact known to many of the listeners. His father was a shipowner, which explained in a natural manner why Ginger happened to be at the docks having a look at the *Indian Queen*, newly arrived in port. Important business accounted for his father not turning up, thus making it necessary for Harry, a faithful old sailor, who had been years in the company's service, to see him to the nearest 'bus.

From that point the tale rapidly rose to dramatic heights. It was a dark night ;

the gloomy streets were enveloped in fog ; one could scarcely see the tips of one's outstretched fingers. But Ginger's hearing was acute, and at one particular corner he heard the soft patter of footsteps. Suddenly two figures darted upon them, there was a glimmer of steel, and Harry sank moaning to the ground.

"It was pretty awful," Ginger admitted, "but I managed to keep my wits about me. The old man had a knobby cudgel. I was on it like a flash, whirling it round and round and shouting for help. I reckon I must have cracked one fellow's skull, and when some people came running up, the two assassins disappeared."

'At this point Birkmyre chipped in with the important statement that he had read in the papers about a sailor being stabbed near the docks, a piece of evidence which went far to establish the truth of the narrative.

"My name was given in one or two of them," said Ginger, who proceeded to relate how they conveyed the injured man to the nearest hospital, where the surgeons discovered he had been stabbed with a long, narrow knife, and that his condition was very critical. "But he is still alive," Ginger added, "though it's not likely he'll recover."

"My stars, you *did* have a gorgeous adventure," exclaimed Marrables enviously, "but where does the—the *talisman* come in?"

"Ah; that's the curious part. Harry gave it to me a week ago, wrapped up in a piece of black skin." He couldn't talk muck, poor old chap, but he managed to tell me it had been taken from an Indian temple, and that it had magic power for good and evil. That's what the fellows

were after. I'm getting nervous about the beastly thing."

"Chuck it away," Birkmyre advised very earnestly.

"I can't do that, it's a kind of keepsake, you see."

"Well, but what does it *do*?" asked Marrables.

"I've only discovered one thing yet. If you put it in a glass of water with the black cap over the top the most wonderful pictures appear. Some are beautiful and others so horrible they make you yell with fright."

"By Jove," cried Marrables, "I'd like to see 'em."

"Hold on a minute," said Brown Minor, "I'll borrow a glass from old Griggers's study; he keeps three or four in his cupboard."

Whether owing to the talisman's evil influence or not, Brown Minor reappeared at the end of some time panting and flushed and minus the tumbler. His tale of disaster was graphic if confused, but his hearers gathered that Griggers had unexpectedly (and unfairly) caught him at the cupboard. Brown Minor in his surprise dropped the glass, which was smashed to atoms. Then that "hulking brute," Griggers, had forced him to pick up the pieces, and amused himself meanwhile by caning the handiest portion of his victim's anatomy. He had then rudely intimated that the tumbler must be replaced—he declared it was the finest cut-glass—and finally, by means of his boot, had assisted the intruder to leave the study.

This sad catastrophe threatened to put an end to the proceedings, but Marrables gallantly offered the use of a gallipot, which Ginger, though doubtful if common

earthenware, could take the place of glass, accepted.

To every one's delight the gallipot proved a huge success, Ginger dropped the talisman gently into the water, covered the top of the jar with the black skin, screwed up his eyes, hunched his shoulders, puckered his brows, and stared at the object before him in the style approved by the best crystal gazers. The dead silence in the room was broken only by the sound of the oracle's voice, as he described the scenes which appeared to his vision.

These were varied and picturesque. Chinese pagodas, Indian temples, Eastern monarchs robed in cloth of gold studded with precious stones—thicker, said Ginger, with a poetic inspiration, than the stars in the Milky Way—lovely gardens ablaze with gorgeous flowers, sparkling fountains, and—OH!

Ginger went limp with sudden fright; his whole body trembled; fear and dread looked from his eyes; his head collapsed, the gallipot overturned, and all the water ran out on the table. His audience was filled with consternation and sympathy, and there were cries of "What is it, old man?" "What did you see?" "You'll feel all the better for telling us."

But the owner of the talisman refused to satisfy them. It was too horrible, he declared, too dreadful; he would throw the beastly thing away.

Marrables picked up the pot and started towards the door. "I'll get some more water," he exclaimed stoutly, "and try my luck. I bet the pictures won't frighten me."

But before his return the bell rang, and the experiment, though not the animated discussion, finished for the night, Marrables

protesting that Ginger was a rotten humbug, but the majority vastly upset by the uncanny incident and wishing the glass ball anywhere but at Temperley.

But one boy at least had not the least doubt that the ball was a real talisman. Barty Spiers had sat the whole time with his eyes fixed and staring. The talisman seemed to have mesmerized him; he thought and dreamed of nothing else. He longed with a great longing to see the wonderful pictures for himself. He shadowed the owner day after day, as if unable to keep away from him, and was terribly disappointed when Ginger roughly refused to hold another exhibition.

Barty was considered rather a model boy, quiet and inoffensive, a studious worker in class, and a conspicuous absentee from the detention room. He never willingly broke a rule and was altogether what Marrables sarcastically described as a "white hen's chick." And yet it was this same Barty who succumbed without a blow to the talisman's evil influence!

A week after term he lay in his bed feverishly excited, while his companions dropped off one by one into healthy slumber. Between eleven and twelve o'clock, when the house was dark and silent, he crept, clad only in pyjamas and soft slippers, out of the room. Along the corridor he shuffled, every nerve in his body tingling with fear, but with a determination that triumphed over every obstacle. By some chance or other Ginger had left the magic ball in his desk, and Barty, who watched him like a cat watching a mouse, had noticed it. Here was a glorious opportunity for satisfying the craving that possessed him.

He had no intention of stealing the

weird thing. His idea was to get it from Ginger's desk, hide it until a good chance offered of seeing the mysterious pictures, and then restore it to its proper place. It was a desperate venture, but some outside influence impelled him to go. Cautiously he made his way, shaking and trembling in every limb, scared half to death by the almost inaudible sounds of his own footfalls, and yet absolutely resolved to secure the wondrous ball.

It was with a sigh of relief that he pushed the black covering inside his upper garment, and with the treasure clutched firmly in his closed fist began the return journey. By this time he shook like a jelly, his nerve had gone all to pieces, he moved along more by instinct than by will, and yet his mood was one of peculiar satisfaction. He groped his way up the stairs and reached the landing where his own dorm. was situated.

And then a hand was laid on his shoulder and a gruff voice demanded in a tone of surprise, "Hallo, who are you?"

The speaker was Mr. Gibbs, the most dreaded master in Temperley.

"If you please, sir," replied the trembling boy, "it's me." That was the most lucid answer he could make.

"And who's me?" asked the voice gruffly.

"If you please, sir, it's—it's Spiers."

"Oh, it's Spiers, is it? What are you doing here?"

Another brilliant flash of imagination brought the reply. "If you please sir, I'm walking."

"Well, I didn't suppose you were flying," said Mr. Gibbs sarcastically, as he switched on a light.

But his anger softened when he perceived

the wretched urchin before him, obviously bordering on a state of collapse, and he said not unkindly, "Get away to your bed and report to me in the morning; you aren't in a fit state to be questioned now."

He accompanied the boy to his dormitory, saw him safely into bed, and went away mightily puzzled; Spiers was the

was answering the master's questions, but to his muddled brain the disappearance seemed a clear case of enchantment. Several times he opened and closed his hand slowly, as if half expecting that the missing ball would return as mysteriously as it had vanished, but presently through sheer exhaustion he fell asleep.



Along the corridor he shuffled, every nerve in his body tingling with fear.

last boy in Temperley he would have expected to find prowling about the school at midnight. "Must have been walking in his sleep," he concluded.

Meanwhile the miserable Barty was suffering under a fresh disaster: the magic ball had mysteriously vanished. As a matter of fact it had slipped unnoticed through his nerveless fingers whilst he

Only one thing was clear in his mind next morning; he must make a full confession to Ginger, and leave the matter in his hands. In one sense at least Barty was a plucky little chap.

Ginger seemed greatly interested and even more astonished, but not at all angry. "A pity old Gibbs caught you, it means a switching, I'm afraid," he said sympathetically,

"but there's no need to tell him anything about the talisman. It's lost right enough, and maybe that isn't a bad thing. It certainly does bring ill-luck. First there was Brown Minor and now you. Well, I don't envy the chap who keeps it. Now, you cut along to old Gibbs and get your little whack. But, I say, not a word to the other fellows; I shan't peach."

"Oh," said Barty gratefully, "that is good of you. But really, Ginger, I never meant to steal it."

"Of course you didn't! I know that well enough. The rotten thing just got on your nerves, that's all."

So Barty took his swishing with a fairly light heart—he never funk'd physical pain—and the Lower Fourth tried, without success, to discover the reason for this amazing incident. The caning of the white hen's chick was indeed a matter for surprise.

And then—though no one connected the two things—came the news that Ginger had lost his talisman. He was very uncommunicative, giving no more information than that it was lost, and he had no idea what had become of it.

"I'm jolly glad," said Birkmyre fervently, "and I hope it's lost for good, it made my flesh creep."

"Rot," exclaimed Marrables, "it was nothing more than a big glass marble, and I don't believe a word of Ginger's yarn," which, however, was not strictly correct.

Meanwhile affairs settled down into their normal condition, the only event of any importance being that Joe, the odd boy, accidentally broke his leg—in the course of a fight, rumour said—and had to be taken to hospital. The Lower Fourth were sorry for Joe, who was a bit of a

favourite, but none of them dreamed that, indirectly, Ginger's wonderful talisman was the cause of his undoing.

CHAPTER II

THE CROWNING DISASTER

ON the morning succeeding Barty's adventure it happened that Joe White, going his usual rounds, caught sight of what appeared to be a big glass marble with remarkable colouring. Picking it up he slipped it into his pocket, intending to make a present of it to his small nephew. Looking at the talisman for the second time, he began to feel uncomfortable. As a mere marble picked up casually, Joe considered it a fair perquisite, but suppose it turned out to be something different, something valuable!

"I won't give it to Jimmy for a day or two," he concluded, "in case anything turns up."

That day proved a most disastrous one for the odd boy. Everything went wrong; he piled mistake on mistake, he left undone all those things he ought to have done, and did all those he ought not to have done with unflagging zeal and energy. In the evening he went into the town, hot, angry, and wondering vaguely how he came to make such a fool of himself.

And then the final misfortune happened. Unfortunately he met Blinking Billy, an old acquaintance, and, stopping for a chat, inadvertently pulled out the talisman with his packet of fags. Both made a wild dive as it rolled into the gutter, and Joe fell with one leg doubled beneath him, and

Billy, who was by no means a feather weight, on top. As a result Joe was carried to hospital with a fractured leg, and the wonderful talisman lay in the mud unnoticed and neglected. As for Joe, he felt inclined to exclaim with the poet, "The end of a perfect day!"

Naturally those details were unknown to Ginger, or his belief—real or pretended—in the evil influences of the talisman would have been greatly strengthened. There certainly were some striking coincidences connected with this bit of glass. It had cost Brown Minor a licking and the bulk of his pocket money; Barty Spiers had suffered the indignity of a severe caning, and now the unlucky Joe was in hospital. On the whole, perhaps, it was a fortunate circumstance that the fatal ball had severed its connection with Temperley.

But the talisman had not quite finished with the Lower Fourth. Its next victim was the half-credulous and half-sceptical Marrables. On a Saturday afternoon, when Joe had been in hospital about three weeks, Marrables had gone to the town in order to make a few purchases. At the corner of a side street he came across a group of excited urchins who had evidently been playing marbles for keeps.

One of them had lost heavily; in fact his whole stock had gone, and he was leaning against a lamp-post looking very sulky and miserable.

"I'll give you ten for he," his most successful rival was saying as Marrables arrived on the scene, "and you'll be able to win all the others back."

"Swop with me, Freddy," another urged, "I'll give you twelve."

Freddy hesitated, rolling an extraordinary

glass marble in his hand. With twelve common ones he could play again and perhaps recover his losses, but it was evident that he had no liking to part with his treasure.

Marrables gasped with astonishment, mingled with delight and a trembling fear; there could be no mistake, he was looking at Ginger's talisman! The ill-luck of its present owner had no significance for him at the moment, though the strangeness of the coincidence appealed to him later. From a plutocrat in the marble line Freddy had sunk to the position of a bankrupt, almost that of a beggar. He had started the game in affluence and plenty; his stock had steadily decreased, not a solitary gleam of good fortune had come to cheer his downward path; he had tried every kind of game with the one inevitable result. His companions marvelled, for he was a don at marbles, the mightiest player among them all; but now his skill had deserted him, time after time he missed the easiest of chances, he did nothing right. Now he listened dully to the competition, waging around him.

"I'll give you ten stoners for it."

"Twelve."

"Twelve and a blood alley."

A muddled urchin with keen, ferrety eyes, offered a dilapidated mouth-organ in exchange. The offer was less generous than it seemed, since the works had long ago been smashed, and the forlorn-looking instrument produced no music.

Then Marrables, cleverly concealing his agitation, began operations.

"That's a pretty marble," he remarked pleasantly—Marrables could be decidedly pleasant when it suited him—"is it for sale?"

"Here you, hook it, you aren't wanted here," cried the owner of the derelict mouth-organ, "we don't want no toffs;" but Freddy's eyes showed a certain interest,

"How much?" he demanded curtly.

Marrables hesitated; price was a critical matter. To name too low a figure might spoil his chance, a high one would probably arouse suspicion.

"It's just the sort of thing I've been looking for," he replied casually, "and I don't mind paying threepence."

The owner of the mouth-organ, recognising that his own deal was off, angrily threw a lump of mud at the speaker; the others made rude and sarcastic remarks about "bloomin' toffs."

Freddy, though a bankrupt, was not without a certain skill in finance. He was secretly amazed by the offer, but this Temperley boy was a mug, and very likely could be squeezed for more. But he mustn't try to spring him too much.

"There ain't another glass alley like this anywhere," he said in a surly tone, "this one's made special. You couldn't get one like this for a tanner, maybe a bob."

Marrables ignored the obvious fact that if there wasn't one you couldn't buy it at any price; he had a share of the money-grubbing instinct too. All he said was, "It's certainly a very uncommon marble."

"Look here," said Freddy, as if impelled by a sudden fit of generosity, "I'll let you have it for a tanner."

Marrables shook his head. "I'd go to fourpence," he announced, "but not more."

The street-corner was a training ground for youthful diplomats. Freddy closed his fist and turned his head away. By pretending not to care he might succeed in screwing out another penny, and when

Marrables finally agreed to "split the difference," the bargain was concluded, the plutocrat quickly making his escape amidst a chorus of hoots and jeers and taunts.

Freddy's subsequent doings lie outside our story, which is concerned entirely with the fortunes of Ginger's talisman. Marrables put it in his pocket, buttoned his jacket tightly, and returned to school. He was in a curious frame of mind. He wanted to believe that Ginger had been ragging them, but could not feel certain. The silly yarn about evil influences was, of course, all rubbish, but there might be some truth in the pictures; he had heard of such things.

Presently it occurred to him that the experiment would not be complete without the black skin, but he could get hold of this easily enough. After the loss of the talisman Ginger had tossed the covering carelessly into his desk, and had showed no further interest in it. Marrables could get it out at almost any time he liked. The main difficulty was finding a place in which to carry out his experiment without being seen by others. The common-room was out of the question, the dormitory little more satisfactory, and of course he possessed no study or even share of one.

Then he had a tremendous brain-wave. Most of the Sixth fellows had single studies, and they weren't always in them. There was Banks, for example, who spent hours in the engineering shop, while Cribby, who was reading for an Oxford scholarship, was often in Mr. Dacre's private room.

Fortune, it is said, favours the brave, and fortune came to the aid of the Lower Fourth boy. Tuesday's board contained the announcement that the Debating



"That's a pretty marble—is it for sale?"

Society would hold a meeting that evening at 7.30 sharp. Marrables felt no interest in the subject for debate—it had something to do with the Abolition of Capital Punishment—but he had a very lively interest in the fact of the meeting. All the Sixth, including Griggers, who was the president, would attend, and thus afford him almost an unlimited choice of a room.

"Griggers is bound to stay till the end," he reflected, "and that will give me heaps of time. I'll use his study."

So it chanced that while the president was tapping the table and angrily calling for order—Griggers' temper was far from equable—the scientific investigator, armed with a gallipot filled with water, the skin

covering, and the priceless talisman, stepped softly into his room and switched on the light. Marrables was terribly excited; he felt on the very eve of an epochmaking discovery. It seemed to him that this was an eventful moment in his career, which indeed it was.

Half frightened, half fascinated, he placed the gallipot on the table, dropped in the talisman with exceeding care and gentleness—one had to be careful in dealing with magic—adjusted the black cap, hunched his shoulders, and bowed his head in imitation of Ginger, and waited. He waited, indeed, a considerable time and nothing happened; the black covering remained a black covering, and no gorgeous

or even horrible pictures rewarded 'the watcher's earnest gaze.

But Marrables brought to his investigation an immense fund of patience. Naturally the experiment needed intense concentration, perhaps even will-power. He banished every other thought from his mind, and stared persistently at the covering. He began to see shapes, very faint and vague, but still they were shapes of some sort. To his disappointment they faded away slowly, as if lacking sufficient power to develop. Still they proved that Ginger's yarn wasn't all bunkum.

Then he remembered that Ginger had sat in a corner of the room only dimly lit: that perhaps accounted for his success. Marrables did not hesitate, but plunged the room into darkness, and concentrated afresh. Five minutes passed—ten—and his patience was rewarded. He saw a figure like that of a seated man—perhaps it was the Eastern monarch on his royal throne, clad in the golden robes that Ginger had seen! It was blurred and indistinct, but redoubled concentration would no doubt make it clearer. Marrables redoubled, and was instantly lost to everything in the outside world.

If you described Griggers as looking fairly staggered when he switched on the light and beheld his uninvited guest, you would not be far wrong. Fully half a minute passed before he demanded in ominous tones, "Hallo, who are you? What are you doing here?"

The seeker after magic rubbed his eyes unsteadily, and gasped as he realised the awful truth. Griggers was no imaginary figure, but a real flesh-and-blood boy with a heavy hand and a thick boot.

"Oh, Griggers," he stammered, "I'm swotting for an examination, and it's very quiet here."

"We'll soon alter that," said the senior, and then sarcastically, "Do you always read in the dark?"

"Oh, I wasn't reading, Griggers, I really wasn't; I was turning things over in my mind. Caesar, you know, and Boadicea, and about the angles of an isosceles triangle."

Griggers grunted. "What have you got there?"

"A gallipot, Griggers."

The senior tore off the covering and glanced inside. "What's this thing?" he barked.

"Oh, please, Griggers, it's—it's Ginger's talisman," the unlucky boy faltered.

The senior picked up the gallipot awkwardly, and it slipped to the floor, breaking in pieces and spilling the water. Unhappily for Marrables, Griggers remembered Brown Minor's exploit, and his wrath exploded. Also he selected a particularly seductive cane and displayed an unholy dexterity in its use. As Marrables, with a handful of shards, shuffled into the corridor, he reflected bitterly that it was a poor bargain for fivepence.

But Ginger's talisman did not accompany him; it had other and more important work to do. Perhaps it was inspired by a spirit of revenge, or only that of a just and fitting punishment; but it lay snugly on the carpeted floor, and patiently bided its time.

"Cheeky little brat," growled the owner of the study, steadfastly regarding the wet patch; "wonder what he was up to with his idiotic talisman? There's no getting to the bottom of these kids nowadays.

However, he won't forget his visit for an hour or two."

He replaced the cane, sat down at his table—carefully avoiding the sodden part of the carpet—and opened his books. Griggers had a good many irons in the fire and neglected none of them. He read steadily, entirely engrossed in his work, until bedtime, then he got up and went unwittingly to meet his fate. He had forgotten the talisman, but that mysterious object had not forgotten him.

Griggers had not the remotest idea how the accident occurred. He was striding across the room when something round got under one foot and tripped him up. "That bally marble," he groaned, "I'll wring that kid's neck in the morning."

But by morning Griggers was not in a fit condition to twist even a chicken's neck. He had put the ball in his pocket and stumbled to the dorm., groaning at every step. The pain had steadily increased, his ankle was swollen and puffy, he could not put it to the ground.

"What's the matter?" inquired Jackson sympathetically.

"Had a fall last night and hurt my ankle, look at it."

Jackson whistled glumly. "You won't be able to play against Reddington."

"Clean crocked!" with a suppressed groan.

Jackson became still more despondent. "That's let us down," he said; "Reddington will whack us good. What did you do it for?"

Griggers actually yelled at him. "You

silly ass! Think I did it on purpose? Hand me my jacket."

He took out Ginger's talisman, glared at it savagely, and handed it to his amazed chum. "Take that beastly thing to the shop," he said; "put it under the steam-hammer, smash it, pulverise it, grind it into dust."

"Right-o," returned Jackson, "but you needn't shout like a maniac. And you'll have to see the doctor. And that ass Snorter will have to play centre-forward. A pretty mess you've made of things."

Griggers gasped and gurgled and gulped till he was black in the face, but Jackson marched off unconcernedly, and on his way to smash the talisman imparted to several members of the football team that old Griggers had gone and let 'em down.

His gloomy anticipations proved correct, and Griggers, seated in the stand with a rest for his foot, watched Temperley bow the knee to their rivals for the first time in three years. And there seemed something unjust in the freely expressed remarks that Reddington wouldn't have won if old Griggers hadn't made such an ass of himself.

In the Upper Fourth opinion as to the genuineness of the mysterious talisman was sharply divided, and there was much heated argument. The only person who had nothing to say was Ginger, and he, as Marrables pointed out, spent his time laughing and grinning like the inmate of a lunatic asylum.

Highland Sports and Pastimes

BY CHARLES MACPHERSON.

AMONG the many attractions which the Scottish Highlands have to offer the tourist, not the least popular are the numerous sports gatherings which are held annually in practically every village in the north.

It is difficult to imagine a more picturesque scene than the Braemar Highland Gathering, which attracts thousands of spectators to the lovely Deeside village. Here, amid the heather-clad hills and the fragrant pine forests, one feels far removed from the conventional atmosphere of the ordinary sports meeting. Everywhere the kilt is strongly in evidence, and the air resounds with the skirl of the pipes. The arrival of the king and his party from Balmoral Castle is the signal for an outburst of cheering. Thereafter the Games are opened in traditional fashion by a grand march past of the assembled clansmen, bravely arrayed in all the glory of the tartan and armed with the ancient Lochaber axe—a truly romantic touch more in keeping with the knightly tournaments of the age of chivalry than with a modern athletic meeting.

The magnificent physique of the competitors excites the admiration of all spectators. Tall, broad-shouldered, and deep-chested, these sturdy Scots are admirably fitted to take part in the strenuous trials

which make up the more outstanding items on the programme.

Such contests as tossing the caber, putting the weight, throwing the hammer, demand brawn and muscle. The typical Scottish athlete, therefore, is a heavy-weight, perhaps rather slow and ponderous in his movements, which still are not lacking in a certain grace.

Tossing the caber is as distinctively Scottish as throwing the discus or the javelin was distinctively Greek. The caber—simply the Gaelic word for pole—is generally a young pine-tree pruned of its branches and measuring anything from sixteen to twenty feet. The aim is not to throw the caber as far as possible, but to toss it in the air so that it turns a complete somersault. As can well be imagined, such a feat calls for considerable judgment, as well as tremendous physical strength on the part of the competitor. Certainly no item is more closely followed by the spectators, and excitement runs high during the contest.

The caber is first raised to a perpendicular position, heavy end pointing upwards. The competitor then grasps it firmly, supporting the lower end against his chest. Immediately he is faced with the difficulty of balancing the sixteen feet of heavy wood. Slowly the heavy end begins to fall forward.

The moment for action has arrived. At once he runs forward and, choosing his moment, hurls the lower end upwards with all his strength. If the toss is successful, the caber will turn over completely and lie in a straight line with the competitor's feet. He is an extraordinary athlete who is successful at the first attempt. If each competitor tries and fails, a portion of the caber is sawn off, the process being continued until a successful toss is made.

Throwing the hammer is another favourite contest at all Highland Games. So many different styles of throwing have been practised at one time or another that it is almost impossible to compare individual performances with any degree of fairness.

Even the type of hammer used has undergone considerable modifications from time to time. Thus in the old days an ordinary blacksmith's hammer from the village smithy would be requisitioned for the local games. To-day a special hammer with a long, stiff handle and weighing 16 lbs., is generally used, but at some sports a flexible handle is allowed. Again the oldest style of throwing was known as the "pendulum swing." Swinging the hammer round the head was not permitted until later; but to-day it is the recognised style. The additional impetus given by swinging the hammer in this fashion before releasing, has added greatly to the distance covered, and records set up by this style cannot be compared with the old standing start. The successful competitor to-day allows himself to spin round in a circle before releasing the hammer. When the competition takes place in a circumscribed area great judgment and care must be exercised to release the hammer at the

right moment, otherwise it might be thrown inadvertently into the midst of the surrounding spectators with disastrous results. The best performances in throwing a 16-lb. hammer stand at approximately 140 feet.

Putting the weight is a popular contest at most school sports, but these Scottish giants would scorn the weight generally employed at such meetings, and prefer to try their strength with something really heavy! They often succeed in hurling a 56-lb. weight a distance of 28 or 30 feet.

Apart from these strong-men contests, the most spectacular item at Highland Games is the pole-vaulting competition. This form of jumping has for some reason or other found little favour among the organisers of school sports. Yet it calls for no extraordinary display of strength. When properly performed, pole-vaulting is one of the most graceful ways of clearing an obstacle.

Grasping the pole firmly with his hands about two feet apart, the jumper takes a short run as for the ordinary high jump. On approaching the upright he plants his pole in the ground about seven inches from the line. Immediately he is flung upwards, and on reaching the cross-stick he throws his pole backwards and hurls himself feet foremost over the bar. Care must be taken to land properly, as a nasty jar can be sustained by falling from such a height.

The real difficulty in pole-vaulting is to remember to throw back the pole at exactly the right moment, as on no account must it touch the cross-bar. To obtain the utmost assistance from his pole, the jumper should wait until it is almost perpendicular before releasing it. Considerable practice is needed before the exact moment of

release can be judged accurately. Care must be taken in selecting a pole. One of pine-wood is generally most favoured, as it combines strength with the necessary lightness.

Capable jumpers frequently clear from 9 to 10 feet in this manner. Indeed the Scottish record for this form of jumping stands at 10 feet 7 inches.

It is perhaps unnecessary to add that the high jump and long leap also figure on the programme. There is a distinguished group of Scottish athletes who can all claim to have cleared the six-foot mark, though none has yet succeeded in surpassing the world's record jump of 6 feet 7 inches set up ten years ago by G. E. Beeson of California.

The standing long leap is slowly falling into disfavour, partly on account of the tremendous strain imposed on a jumper in taking off without a preliminary run. In the running leap, several performances of over 20 feet have been recorded. The world's record (24 feet 11½ inches) is still held by an Irishman, P. J. O'Connor of Dublin, who performed this wonderful feat as long ago as 1901.

What is known as the hop, step, and leap is another form of jumping popular at all Scottish gatherings, and distances of from 45 to 48 feet have been covered in this way.

These Highland Games have produced an extraordinary number of excellent all-round athletes, who have achieved dis-

tinguishment in every branch of sport. The nature of the contests certainly discourages a too rigid specialising, and lends itself to the development of the all-round athlete. What athlete of to-day can equal the record of the veteran Donald Dinnie who, throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, was the undisputed champion at all Highland Games?

A man who was the champion caber-tosser, who could throw the 16-lb. hammer nearly 140 feet, hurl a 24-lb. weight over 37 feet, jump 5 feet 11 inches, meet and defeat all comers at wrestling, can be reckoned no ordinary sportsman.

Too often the champion has his brief period of fame and makes way to a newcomer. But this veteran held for twenty-five years the proud title of champion all-round athlete of the world, undertaking long tours in America and Australia in defence of his title. When well over fifty years of age, he was still competing regularly and successfully at all Highland Games.

Such is the splendid type of athlete nurtured amid the mountains and glens of the Scottish Highlands, and trained from boyhood in the exercise of all manly sports and pastimes. This brief description of their Games may well teach the salutary lesson that athletic prowess is not to be gauged simply by the ability to run the "hundred" in ten seconds, or the mile in four-twenty, but rather by an all-round excellence in the field of sport.



The RIVER KELPIE MYSTERY

E. Talbot

“WHEW-W!” said Grouse.
“Whew-w!” said I.

Grouse’s uncle looked uncommonly pleased at our amazement.

“A nice bit of river, eh?” said he.
“Well, it was that which decided me to rent the castle. It’s for fishing chiefly that I wanted a little Highland place. A few friends now and then. Salmon, and——”

“Whew-w!” said I again. But this time I whew-w-ed internally. I wasn’t used to such grandiloquent ways of thought. And I was a bit nonplussed by the grandness and greatness of everything within Grouse’s uncle’s marble halls.

To begin at the beginning—which I haven’t done yet, I notice—I’d been invited by Grouse—who’s my chief chum at school—to come along with him down to his uncle’s new place in the Highlands. I was only too keen; it was a topping chance. I’d never been farther north than Glasgow before. And the Highlands were absolutely IT. In fact, my heart was

there ahead of me, and had been ever since I was a kid.

Well, to stop meandering, here was I, after it—a year or two after the heart, I mean. Grouse and I had travelled up together, and owing to Grouse’s tales on board the train I had grown more and more keen with every mile of the way.

“I’ve never been there yet, either, old chap,” said Grouse; “fact is, Uncle Toby’s only leased the place this year. He’s dead keen on fishing, and he’s only been back from the East since the spring, so he means to make the most of lost time. I’ve badgered him into having me down early on, because I simply must see the place, and uncle’s a ripper. Did I tell you it was a castle of sorts?”

He hadn’t. I felt a bit nervous. I’d never been inside a castle in my life, to the best of my belief, without paying sixpence outside on some show day and being led round by a guide. And I told Grouse so instantly.

“Not a show place,” remarked Grouse;

"uncle says he wishes it wasn't called a castle at all; but it would be as much as his life is worth to suggest a change. Deys Castle it's been called round about, and it's only got a turret or two, uncle says, to account for its name. But the people up there are awfully 'dour,' as he says. They hate changes, and——"

"Meaning?" said I.

"Oh, nothing in particular; nothing worth mentioning. Some Americans had the place before him, and he's taken it on from them with a few servants intact. It's *that* that the villagers object to, I believe. Uncle had a contingent up to ask if they mightn't serve him, as they'd served the old laird. Evidently they hadn't cottoned on to the Americans' servants; and they'd grown used to a sort of feudal system of sorts and wanted to stick to it. All very right, as uncle said in a letter to dad; and he rather wished he hadn't already agreed to take on the staff which was there already. But he had agreed, and that was that. 'They bring quite the wrong sort of atmosphere, too, into the place,' uncle wound up; 'I'd by long chalks rather have had a Highland retinue! But I'm bound to stick to this lot for a year at least.'"

Grouse broke off.

"Well, that's all there is to that, and it's not in the least worth telling. Only, since you asked what I meant by saying that the villagers up at Deys were not keen on new ideas, or new people——"

"Hope they'll cotton on to us," said I.

But it was with rather a quaking heart that I stepped from the train. Not on account of fears of being sloganned—or whatever it is that they do—by a set of Highland chieftains for not being Highland

myself, but because I didn't much want to dwell in gilded halls, and rather wondered what I was in for. Within two ticks of being with Grouse's uncle, Colonel Morton, however, I knew that he was some chap. Not an ounce of side about him, but jolly fine. I forgot about the turrets and troops of servants, and found myself inside the castle itself before I'd had time to remember again that it *was* one.

It wasn't until after lunch that we went down to the river, which was the crown of the place.

"Set in silver, you see," said Grouse's uncle. "The Tweed runs right round the grounds; almost makes an island of the little place. In fact, we can't go out or in without crossing one of the many bridges. And that reminds me——"

Major Morton grinned.

"Pull yourselves together," said he, "if you're afraid of spooks. It appears that we've got one here!"

"What!" said we; "in the castle?"

"No, not indoors. In fact, I shouldn't think by the sound of it that this particular spook would be very comfortable anywhere except in the water. To tell the truth, I'm a bit vague about it, myself; and don't at all expect to become less vague. But Peters, the head gamekeeper, told me about it."

"What is it, though, uncle?" inquired Grouse with greed.

"Well, he wasn't very sure about anything, I think, except its reality. Of that he seemed quite positive. A water-kelpie, he called it. And he strongly advised me to keep away from this part of the river by night. He told me that he'd seen it, himself, on one occasion, and had been 'knocked quite silly.' Well, I let him

run on; and, as I have said to you, I told him that I didn't expect to do much night-fishing just yet awhile, so he needn't fear for my life as far as the water-kelpie was concerned!"

"Would it have killed you?" I inquired.

"Oh, rather. That appears to be its aim in life. To lie in wait by night for unwary wanderers and drown 'em. By Peters' description it had flaming hair—a kind of mermaid, I should imagine. He said that the Highlanders, when he came up——"

"Then isn't *he* one?" we asked.

"What! With the name of 'Peters!' Not he! Any of the servants round about the estate who belong to the neighbourhood are all labelled with a Mac. A jolly good set of servants, too, if they haven't got the polish of Peters and the others that I took on with the estate. Still, I can't complain. I don't even complain of the kelpie; who gives local colour, if nothing else. There's only one thing I do complain of . . ." Grouse's uncle looked serious.

"What?" we asked.

"The salmon. I've an inkling that I've been taken in a trifle over my lease. It all happens, no doubt, on account of the fact that I've been too long in the East, and I was so keen on getting this fishing that I suppose I didn't take proper precautions. But although Peters says that the close season was rigorously kept, and no poaching allowed, yet, so far, there's been a distinctly disappointing salmon-season. I'd heard great accounts of these waters; even out at Ipok I used to read of the whoppers of fish that came along this particular way. But now——"

"Law of averages, uncle," said Grouse comfortingly; "next season, perhaps."

"Perhaps. Peters has something of the same kind of comfort to bestow. But . . . I've a good lot of friends coming down before long—keen rodsmen, too—and I'd like to give them good sport."

We turned and went back to the house. "Fortune of war, I suppose," said the colonel. "To tell the truth, I rather wonder——" He stopped.

"I suppose," I put in, with intent to comfort, "that the water-kelpie couldn't have anything to do with it!"

For I'd been thinking. Likewise I knew enough about Highland ways—through sheer keen and tremendous interest in them, not because I'd ever been there—to get a sudden notion. I let Grouse yell at me, and I didn't mind the colonel's rather dry grin—they didn't cotton on to what I meant, that was all. But I did mean something. In fact I was trying to put two and two together and make four. And the first "two" of the sum had been provided by the colonel himself.

I proceeded to explain more fully what I meant that evening to Grouse when we'd gone bedwards—Ho, with a Rumble—oh! and were staring through our window in the direction where the river ran.

"Queer," said Grouse; "we can't see the river from here."

"Nor here from the river, if you know what I mean," said I. "I noticed that while we were standing on that wooden bridge this afternoon talking about the kelpie with your uncle. And, talking about the kelpie, I might mention that I'm not quite such a fool as you thought me."

"Glad you mentioned it, old chap," said Grouse.

"Thanks. Well, listen here. Highlanders are jolly superstitious. And there

must be something in their superstitions, mustn't there? They wouldn't just make them out of nothing. Well, the Highlanders don't care, apparently, for the servants from the south; your uncle said as much. Well, then—what's to hinder the Highland spook which, in this case, appears to be a kind of river-guardian, from hating the southern owner, 'too?'

"Seems a bit . . . rocky, your logic," remarked Grouse. "What, exactly, is a kelpie for the matter of that?"

I wasn't absolutely sure, and said so.

"Better ask one of the Highland servants, I should say," I suggested.

"Or Peters. We'll run him to earth to-morrow. By uncle's accounts he seems to know all about 'em," said Grouse.

Well, as a matter of fact, I hadn't come to the Highlands to hear about kelpies from southern gamekeepers. I didn't say so to Grouse, being a guest, you know; and therefore, I hope, having decent manners. But I made up my mind that accidentally or on purpose I'd run across a real live Highlander next day, and ask him. I did.

It was Dougal, the old gardener. He'd been cheery enough during the first part of our conversation; but a sudden film seemed to come over his eyes, and he began to dig vigorously when I mentioned the kelpie.

"What's yon?" asked he.

"That's what I want to know," said I. "A kelpie isn't an English thing. There's one that lives in the river, isn't there?"

"A couldna say," remarked Dougal, digging away.

"Have you ever seen it?" I asked.

"A wouldna say thet & had nor yet thet a hadna," said Dougal.

This seemed final. He turned and went off. And yet there was something about him that made me wonder if he didn't know a grand lot more than he'd pretended to. I left the scene of his gardening just as Grouse came up.

He was off down to the river. His uncle had given him a new rod, and he wanted to try it. There was one for me in the rod-room, he said, if I'd go and get it. "Follow me down to the bridge where we were yesterday," yelled Grouse.

I was about five minutes later than he was, or thereabouts. By the time I arrived he was not alone. He was talking to an individual whom I instantly took, and rightly, to be Peters. And . . . the sight of him was like a blot on the landscape.

Don't think I saw anything amiss with him, exactly; but he was so terribly like a gamekeeper on a model estate. He wore just the right things; he might have been cut out of a sporting print. And yet—he seemed "out of the picture" up here; a jolly old Highland gillie would have fitted in better.

That's what I thought, anyway; but I didn't put much weight on my thoughts; in two ticks I'd forgotten 'em too, for weren't the pair of them deep in the kelpie subject. Into the subject I plunged, also, without delay.

"Come on, old chap; this'll make your blood curdle!" yelled Grouse, grinning.

But though Grouse was grinning, Peters most certainly was not. It seemed evident from the set look on his features that he believed every word he said. There was a kelpie, said he, and many a time he'd thought that he'd have to give up his job on account of it. Near lost his life more than once, had Peters, until he'd had to

give up night-fishing altogether. Oh, yes; the last tenants left on account of it. Couldn't stand it. But——

"I should have thought that Americans would have stayed long enough to fish it up and take it home across the herring

that! The first time I saw it, why, a fire-work it might have been, with its long red 'air, and its clinging 'ands. I fled, young gents, like a harrow! I can't say more. And there's not many things will shake my nerve."



He began to dig vigorously when I mentioned the kelpie.

pond with 'em," said I. But the subject was evidently too solemn a one in Peters' estimation to be laughed at.

"Believe me, young gents," he said, "there's no subject for laughter, here! I see a joke, I 'ope and trust, as soon as any; but this kelpie is a bit more than

SB. AN.

"Did it seize you?" I asked.

"If it had, young sir, I'd not be speaking to you this day," said Peters. "No more of it did I see than a fiery rocket—if you take my meaning. That, young sirs, is 'its 'air. Mer-maidens, sir, you've likely heard of. Well, but they hasn't the lust for blood,

sirs, begging your pardon, as has the kelpie!"

"What does it want it for?" inquired Grouse in a matter-of-fact voice.

But Peters didn't know and didn't want to know. All he did know was what he'd heard from one and another in the village round about. How the kelpie felt the river to be its own; and hated 'uman bridges. Peters shivered. "They ain't never safe at night-time. A great hate for every bridge has the kelpie."

"Whew-w!" said we. Then we left the kelpie subject certainly feeling much impressed, and set to work to try our hand after a salmon or two.

It was perhaps because we had no luck at all that we reverted to the subject on our way back over the layns.

"Jolly hard on uncle," said Grouse. "Imagine his feelings if all his old cronies turn up and have no sport."

"Rather," said I.

"You don't think there's anything in that hare-brained idea of yours, re the kelpie, eh?" said Grouse. "I must say that after Peters' yarns, the creature sounds wild enough to do anything. Heard 'em from the villagers, he said, didn't he?"

"Wish they'd told me as much," said I, and recounted my conversation with Dougal. "I say," said I, "let's look up kelpies in the dic., and see what they are."

The dic. didn't help us much; it wasn't till we'd hit on an encyclopædia and been headed off on a search through "Demonology" which fairly made us bristle with eagerness that we found a reference to kelpies there. Yes, Peters was right with regard to their hate for bridges: and they did, as he'd said, haunt pools and rivers in hopes of drowning the unwary. Peters

was dead-right every time. It was during lunch when we told Colonel Morton of our morning talk that he interposed.

"What? Peters heard all that from the villagers? I bet the man didn't. They've got quite a different tale to tell. They say, at least old Dougal, who has been on the estate for two generations says, that the kelpie, here, has always been friendly. Oh, yes, he believes in it implicitly, and he's furious with the tales that Peters is telling—'Ef the kelpie's dangersome 'tis juist that he's taken a scunner at them thet hes nae richt to be round about.' That's what Dougal's explanation is. Oh, quite likely he wouldn't want to talk kelpie with you, old chap," said the colonel to me; "kelpies are a sore subject round about here just now."

"Then how——" But I stopped. An idea was slowly, I think, from that moment coming into my head.

"I say," said I to Grouse that afternoon; "I've got no end of an idea. How about . . . laying it?"

"Laying how much?" inquired Grouse. He didn't look much wiser, either, when I'd finished explaining.

"But . . . how could we?" he asked.

"Don't know; but I mean to find out. Stands to reason, I rather think that Dougal knows more about this particular kelpie than Peters does. Well, if the kelpie's dangersome, as Peters says, we might be wise, maybe, to keep from the bridge. But if, on the other hand, as Dougal says, it isn't—we might go down by night——"

"Steady on. If Peters isn't right, why on earth should he——" began Grouse.

"Why," said I, loudly and slowly; "that's just what I'm beginning to ask myself."

"But he said,—"

"He said he'd heard the tales from the villagers. But, so far as I can see, he's cribbed 'em out of the encyc. He's got 'em word for word. He says——"

"Right-o!" said Grouse slowly, "I'm with you, all right. Suppose we go down by night and try the kelpie's tricks. 'We'll stand on the bridge at midnight, old chap, while the clock is striking thirteen . . . !'" Grouse's voice is cracked, and his singing unmelodious, but he had agreed to come, and that was all I cared.

Why were we going? Perhaps we didn't exactly know. But there was a sort of feeling at the back of me that Peters didn't want us to, and that Peters had given us too many reasons why we shouldn't, and that, to tell the truth in a nutshell, Peters seemed a bit of a fibber. . . . Besides, if the kelpie was playing any tricks with Colonel Morton's salmon, we'd rather like, we thought, to be in the know of what it *was* doing, and beg it to desist.

"Mermaid's hair like rockets sounds a good gadget, too, doesn't it?" said Grouse, as we made ourselves ready. "And how about being the good lads of the story-book who saved their uncle's fish!"

He was only ragging, of course, but—well, that comes later on. Meanwhile, we went!

It was a bit of a lark too; for we went unbeknownst. No one particularly wants to make a fool of himself, and there was little likelihood that Grouse and I would make anything else. We knew it, however, and were content to take the chance.

"The bridge?" murmured Grouse, when we'd got outside. "You'll risk the long arms of the kelpie, eh?"

Nights in summer are pretty lightsome

times in the Highlands, but on this particular one it was cloudy and inclined to drizzle with Scotch mist. For that reason, also because we felt conspirator-like, we'd wrapped ourselves up in top-coats, and slithered along like thieves. We arrived at the bridge, however, and, having reached it, we felt about as much inclined for our little beds as we'd ever felt in our lives before.

"Talk of a wild-geese chase!" said I.

"Talk of geezers!" said Grouse. "What have we come for, eh? D'you know? for I don't! I wish a kelpie would set light to one of her rockets, if only to warm my hands!"

It was at that instant that something happened.

Nothing much. If it had happened by day-time we should have yawned at it. It was merely the creaking of a branch; and then—voices, was it? . . . Suddenly we were as alert as ever we'd been in our lives. I longed to inquire of Grouse whether kelpies owned the gift of speech, and he said afterwards that he was longing to inquire of me the selfsame question; but, stir we didn't; stand on the bridge we did. And then . . .

It was unexpected, quite. . . . A flare seemed to light up the river suddenly and without the least warning!

"The—kelpie!" Grouse was beginning to whisper, when he, and I too, suddenly knew that it was not.

It was connected with the voices—the flare was. And—the voices were not those of any kelpie. One of the voices was that of Peters. We stood still and stared.

"Fishing—that's what they're doing!" muttered Grouse; "and by the Lord Harry—if flare-fishing isn't forbidden by

law. To say nothing of—oh, the wretch ! Here, let's scoot ! They're too busy to notice us. This explains the kelpie-yarn ! Oh, I say, if only we can get uncle down there to catch them red-handed ! ”

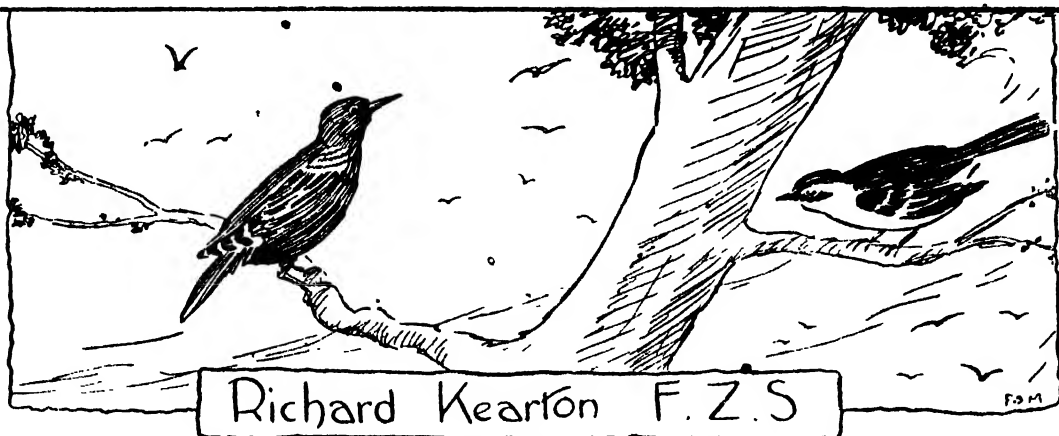
Well, that's all. All of our part, I mean ; because we *did* ! We were rattling at Colonel Morton's door before ten minutes had passed. In a brace of shakes he'd understood our story, though it took longer for him to believe it. It wasn't till he'd actually arrived at the bridge himself and had stood there watching Peters at his little tricks—helped by another servant or two, and all southerners—that he really credited our discovery as being true.

Peters left Deys Castle next day. It appeared, after due investigation, that

Peters had a brother in town who disposed of the salmon for him. Peters was a wily one who had twisted the kelpie tale round about until it suited his ends. The Scottish servants had shown true Highland intuition in loathing Peters.

Well, and that really is all, except that when Colonel Morton's cronies did arrive for the fishing, they got as fine sport as even the colonel himself had wished for them. The river was teeming—there were as good fish in it as ever the American tenants had promised, only so far they had all risen to greet Peters's flare ! Grouse and I stayed up the whole of that hols ; the colonel said he needed us to preserve the fish. Not from the kelpie, however—that fear had passed—with Peters !

BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY



Richard Kearson F.Z.S

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IT is hardly possible to imagine a more fascinating hobby than that of wild bird photography for either boys or girls. Its advantages are many and valuable. It necessitates the expenditure of time in the open air, generally amidst the most beautiful surroundings; the cultivation of one's powers of observation; the exercise of skill and care on its scientific side, and produces results that are a lasting joy, to say nothing of their saleable value amongst publishers of magazines and other periodicals.

Birds are such shy, wary creatures that it is almost impossible to come within photographic reach of them, excepting during the breeding season or throughout long spells of hard weather in the winter,

when they are tamed by hunger. I propose to deal with the former phase of the work in this article first because it is by far the most important.

It is, of course, assumed that the reader knows something about natural history, and would not go searching for a skylark's nest in a hedgerow or that of a tree-sparrow amongst the grass of a meadow.

As the old cookery books used to say, before describing how to prepare the animal for the table, "Catch your hare first," so the photographer must find a bird's nest in a suitable position before trying to portray its owner. In searching for the home of a song thrush, blackbird, hedge-sparrow, or chaffinch, always walk on the shady side of a hedgerow or bush,

looking in an upward direction through the foliage. In the month of May a very useful plan is to walk quietly and silently among furze and bramble bushes, tapping their upper parts gently with a long slender stick and listening intently for a rustle of wings, which generally means that a mother bird has just slipped off her nest and thereby told you where to look for it.

In the month of June, when many nests are full of young ones and the old birds are busily engaged in finding worms, grubs, caterpillars, and moths for their offspring, this plan is next door to useless, and it is far better to sit down at some spot commanding a good view and keep a sharp outlook for any adult bird with food in its bill. I have found many interesting nests by watching their owners go to them with food and taking their departure again in search of more. In cases of this kind it is very important to make careful mental notes of the different objects between your position and the place where the bird has entered and left. Of course one is occasionally misled by tracking parent birds down in the act of feeding chicks that have already left the nest. In that case any attempt at photography had better be abandoned, for it is very likely to prove a waste of time.

By far the best time to take photographs of robin redbreasts, brown wrens, hedge-sparrows, tit larks, and all other feathered friends that rear their young ones in nests is whilst they are in the act of feeding their offspring. But of course in all cases where the chicks leave the nest and commence to wander about soon after they are hatched, as is the custom with curlews, peewits, sandpipers, redshanks, and many other ground builders, the work

must be done whilst the eggs are in the nest, otherwise it will never be done at all.

In dealing with the latter class of birds, two important factors are likely to lead to success. Firstly, careful hiding; and secondly, selecting a time for photographic operations when your "sitters" are on the point of hatching off their chicks. They are very keen at this period, and will approach almost anything, provided it does not stir or make a noise.

I have used all kinds of hiding contrivances in my time, such as a stuffed ox, dummy sheep, artificial tree trunks, rocks, and so on, but do not think there is anything to beat my little green tent in point of cheapness, handiness, and utility. It is made on the principle of a woman's skirt, with a tape running through the waist-band in such a manner that I can all but close it up. It is six feet in height and about fifteen feet in circumference at the base, and quite easily accommodates the camera and photographer on a seat. Holes consisting of vertical slits three or four inches in length perforate its upper parts all round, and through one of these the lens of the camera can be easily pushed or a stick placed crosswise if the aperture should be required to observe through.

When working in woods and by hedge-sides, I cover my little hiding tent with branches and leaves, but if I am compelled to use it on a bare common or moor, I camouflage it with heather, rushes, or rough grass. If one has a companion to tuck one up and see that no twig or other obstruction is likely to slip down in front of the lens, so much the better. As birds cannot count, an arrangement of this kind also proves very beneficial in the saving of time. For upon watching the photo-

grapher's companion away from the scene of action, the "sitter" concludes that the coast is clear and returns home with confidence and expedition.

Never commence operations at too close quarters. I always start work at some distance, and advance by degrees as I establish myself in the confidence of the creature I am engaged in studying. If you have to leave your hiding tent whilst a bird is sitting on its nest in front of you, take the greatest care to slip out quietly at the back. Remember that a bad scare may make your "sitter" forsake, and if it does not, is sure to render her shy and wary for quite a while.

Every feathered creature possesses an individuality of its own, just as every human being does. One day you may try to photograph an exceedingly shy and wary snipe that will show the utmost dread of your lens, although nothing else remains to be seen, but don't jump to the conclusion that all the members of the species are the same, for it is highly probable that the very next snipe you try will be as bold as brass. I once photographed one that I could not drive off her nest by shouting at the top of my voice, although I was only eight or nine feet away.

Of course it is always desirable to secure as clear a view as possible of a bird's nest and its surroundings, but in opening a place out, do not cut or break off branches. Tie them back with string, and in the case of heather, rushes, or rough grass, it is desirable to control by means of wooden pegs that can be easily cut from any hedge, and driven into the ground.

Whilst it is desirable to have as little as possible that is out of focus showing in

a photograph, it must be remembered that most nests are well hidden, and the situation must not be trimmed or "gardenized" until it looks as bare and plain as a tennis lawn. Above all things, when you have finished your work put every branch and leaf, tussock of rushes, or sprig of heather back again as nearly in its original position as possible. You owe this to the bird and your conscience.

Fledglings make very pretty pictures if you can induce two or three to sit for you on a twig. This is a little difficult, but can be accomplished by the exercise of kindness and patience. The greatest care must be taken not to ruffle the feathers of the chicks, because a photograph, however good from a technical point of view, that shows a young bird has been roughly handled, is an eyesore rather than a thing of beauty.

Very pretty pictures can be made of nests and eggs, but of those in bushes and hedges care must always be taken not to strive after a bird's-eye view and thus render the result more or less unnatural. If one or two eggs or parts of them are shown in the nest of a lesser whitethroat or a bullfinch, it is all that is necessary or desirable. Something must be left to the imagination even in a photograph. In the case of open nests on the ground such as those of seagulls, sea-swallows, and peewits, of course it is a different story, and you are justified in showing all the eggs as they would be seen by a person looking down upon them.

Winter photography of birds may be carried out more or less successfully in the garden. I attract the titmice by feeding them upon cocoa-nut, or the kernels of Spanish nuts. The camera is fixed up

in a suitable position close by, and the shutter released from indoors by means of a long piece of pneumatic tubing and a rather large air ball.

Robins, hedge-sparrows, chaffinches, song thrushes, blackbirds, and starlings may all be attracted to a given spot in the garden by feeding them regularly in hard weather upon soaked dog-biscuits, of which they are all very fond.

Having described the methods which I have always found successful in my field work, it now becomes necessary to say something about the apparatus most likely to produce satisfactory photographic results. I use a stand camera equipped with time and instantaneous shutters, either of which can be thrown into or out of gear at a moment's notice. The more silent a time shutter is the better, for birds are possessed of an acute sense of hearing and any unfamiliar sound alarms them.

The focal length of my lens is nine inches, and it works at f 6. I recommend a lens of this kind for all ornithological work, because of its speed and the size of the image it gives on the photographic plate.

A knowledge of the speed of the plates being used and judgment in regard to the power of light are necessary. You will most likely under-expose your plates in woods and over-expose them whilst working by the sea shore. A light meter is a very useful instrument to carry in one's waistcoat pocket, as it will often correct a faulty estimation and save a good deal of heart-burning over a failure, and what is worse still, a lost opportunity.

Long experience has convinced me that success or failure after the exercise of care and intelligence in photography of any kind is largely due to the character of the plates one is using. Rightly or wrongly, I have come to the conclusion that it is just as difficult to go wrong with a batch of good fresh plates as it is to go right with a stale one. I have heard some wonderful stories of good results obtained by the use of plates of ancient manufacture, but all I can say is that they run contrary to my own experience.

The following incident will, I think, show there is something in what I have said upon this particular point of great importance to the amateur photographer. Happening to run short of plates on one occasion, I walked into a chemist's shop in a provincial town and finding a pyramid of boxes on a counter I carefully took it down, selected a box from the base, re-adjusted the artistic pile, and offered the chemist my money. Taking it, he grinned and remarked, "Ay, but you know something, mister." I answered, "Well, I wasn't dug up yesterday, and naturally concluded that you would not put your stalest plates at the bottom of a pile."

This is worth remembering if you are compelled to buy plates a long way from home.

Finally, let me say that any boy or girl ready to exercise an ordinary amount of patience and care will find natural history photography a very pleasant and in all probability profitable pastime.

WON FOR THE SCHOOL



CHAPTER I

A TWO-MAN STUDY

IT seemed only right, after their long friendship at Claverhill College that, on reaching the Sixth Form, Grafton and Mallor should find themselves sharing No. 5, which was a "two-man" study. They had just eaten their supper, and now sat waiting for the bell which would summon all members of the School-house to prayers.

"There's one thing I wish," murmured Mallor, as he dusted some biscuit crumbs from his coat.

"What's that?"

"I wish there'd been a study big enough for three, and that we two and Holme could have had it."

"Oh, it's just as well he's got a den of his own," laughed Grafton. "He'd poison

us some fine day, and it would be thought we'd committed suicide."

Though Holme might be called the star performer in the carpenter's shop, during the last two years his active mind had been attracted by chemistry; and, not content with his labours in the Lab. he had more than once, in his own study, attempted some original experiments which were unbearable at close quarters.

"We'd put a stop to those little games," declared Mallor; "we'd make it a rule——"

The speech was interrupted by a rap on the door, and the next moment Holme himself entered the study. He was carrying a large bottle, which might once have contained pickles, through the cork of which ran two glass tubes.

"Now then, my boy, don't bring any of your poison-gas bombs in here," cried Grafton. "Take it out, and drop it in a bucket of water. We were just talking about you——"

"Don't get excited, it's quite harmless," interrupted the newcomer, holding up the bottle. "There, you can see for yourselves there's nothing in it. I called in to know if either of you had a couple of stamps to sell."

"Here you are," said Mallor, producing a leather case from his pocket. "Don't run away; tell us what you've been doing."

The visitor placed his bottle on the study table, and perched himself beside it. The air which came through the open window felt cool and refreshing after the heat of the long summer day.

"I went across to your study just now to see if you'd come and have some grub with us, but you weren't there," continued Mallor. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, I went to get something to bore holes in this bung, to pass the tubes through."

"But what's it for?" demanded Grafton. "Something wicked, I'll be bound. I've half a mind to chuck it out of that window."

"Get away," laughed Holme, "I tell you there's nothing in it. By the way, it may interest you to know that I've been made President of the Lower School Aeronautic Club."

"What on earth's that?" cried Mallor.

"Well, it's only recently been founded, and there's been no special tie or hat ribbon invented for it yet. Short, Witney, and my young cousin, the child Gregg, are the members. It seems they've got three of those toy balloons like those you see let off sometimes at a fancy fair. Each is to have a postcard tied to it with a request that the finder will drop it in the post, and just say where it was picked

up. That'll decide which of 'em gets the prize."

"Who's going to give the prize?"

"The kids themselves—the two losers. The race, as you might call it, is won by whichever balloon gets farthest away from the school. If, we'll say, Short's postcard comes from a place more remote than the other two, then Short wins; and it'll be up to Gregg and Witney to purchase and present to him a silver cup, about as big as a thimble, which they've seen in the window of a jeweller's shop down in the town."

"Quite a sporting idea," laughed Grafton. "And are they going to allow you to send up a balloon?"

"No, they came to me to know if I'd fill the balloons with gas. That's what this bottle's for. I said, if I supplied the hydrogen, they'd have to make me President of the club."

"That comes of being a handy man," chuckled Mallor.

"Yes, I'm always getting chaps after me to do this, that, or the other. I've made some queer things in my time; d'you remember the camera-gun, and Jope's man-trap?"

The two listeners laughed, and sat for a few moments recalling events which had happened in the past.

"We shall have a fresh Honours Board recording who won the balloon race each year," said Mallor. "I doubt if there's another school in the kingdom has an Aeronautic Club."

"And I'm the President," said Holme. "That's some distinction. I never expected to be president of anything at Claverhill. It's something the fellows ought to remember me by."

"Get away!" exclaimed Grafton. "You made yourself famous for ever more by saving all the School-house cups from being stolen. Every new kid is told about it. Then there's Mallor here, no end of a swell as secretary and leading light of the Natural History Society. I'm the only one who's never done anything, and never shall."

The speaker leant back, expanded his broad chest, and stretched his muscular arms.

"You've got your Colours for the House Fifteen," said Holme. "I'd rather have that than be President of the Aeronautic Club. I don't suppose there'll ever be any colours for ballooning."

"Oh, House Colours are nothing," grumbled Grafton. "I shan't ever be good enough to play footer for the school, and at cricket I'm hopeless. I don't know how it is, but I always have been. This afternoon I was bowled about twenty times when it came to be my turn at the net. There's one place where I'd be prepared to meet all comers, and that's in the water, but of course it's impossible to have any swimming races here."

Holme and Mallor nodded their agreement. One thing the college lacked was a swimming bath, the only accommodation of the kind was a pool in the Fream, which, though commonly spoken of as the "river," was hardly more than a large brook. The spot where the dressing-shed had been erected was reached by a footpath across three fields, but, though the journey was short, the pool itself was so small, and usually so crowded as to make bathing in it poor sport for a really good swimmer.

"I believe the Head wanted to get a proper bath for the college this year, but

the governors jibbed at the cost," said Mallor.

"Oh, I suppose there'll be a swimming bath some day, though it won't be in our time," growled Grafton. "By the way, I had a row down at the pool this morning."

"Who with?"

"Why, with Carth, or rather with Carth and Berger—they usually hunt in couples."

The boys named were members of the Lower Fifth, though they should, by now, have reached the upper division. They were notorious slackers in both work and play, and the School-house would gladly have exchanged them "for anything useful" with one of the other houses.

"Your young cousin was trying to float," continued Grafton, turning to Holme. "Then Carth got hold of his legs and stood him on his head—half drowned the poor kid. It's the sort of thing Carth is always doing, so I waited till he was in deep water, and then I gave him a jolly good ducking so that he should know what it felt like."

"Serve him right," chuckled Holme.

"Carth and Berger came up to me when I'd finished dressing. They gave me a lot of cheek, and wanted to know if I imagined I was a prefect. They'd have set about me if they'd dared, but I told them if they didn't shut up I'd chuck them both in the pool. It's a wonder I didn't, but they saw I wasn't going to stand any more humbug, and they walked off. Carth called back that he'd get even with me some time."

"D'you think he meant it?" asked Mallor.

"No fear; he was just gassing."

"It's a funny thing," began Mallor, after a moment's thought, "I came in here soon after tea, and saw Carth and

Berger standing down in the yard, staring up at this window. They turned and strolled away as soon as they saw me. At the time it struck me as a bit queer. Now, I wonder if they were scheming revenge on you, my boy—whether they meant to chuck a rock through the open window in the hope of smashing something."

"Oh, they wouldn't do that; they know I should go for them if they did," replied Grafton. "Besides, it's very doubtful if they know which is our study. I'm not going to trouble my head about Carth and Berger; but there was one thing they said this morning which has been bothering me ever since. It's stupid of me, I know, but it sort of got on my mind."

"What was that?"

"Their asking if I imagined I was a pre. It reminded me of something the Head said when he was speaking to me the other day. I suppose I shall be a prefect next term, and I tell you I don't feel equal to the job."

"Rubbish!" laughed Holme. "You ought not to funk about being made a pre.; you're big enough, anyway."

"Yes, but the fellows don't think much of a man who isn't good at sports. They know I'm a crock at cricket, and very little use in footer. Chaps like Carth will do all they can to make a fool of me. It's no good thinking you'll keep them in order by knocking their heads together. Prefects aren't supposed to do that sort of thing."

"Oh, bless your life, you'll get on all right," cried Mallor. "Don't jump before you reach the stile."

The clanging of the bell put an end to the conversation. Holme dashed off to deposit his bottle in his own study, then

joined the procession of seniors moving along the corridors. Prayers were conducted as usual by the Head Master in the big dining-hall. As a rule Mr. Whitcomb left the room as soon as prayers were over, but on this occasion he lingered, and it became evident that he had some announcement to make.

"What boy attempted to open the letter-box this afternoon?" he inquired.

There was no reply, only a turning of heads as boys glanced at one another with a look of puzzled surprise. The box referred to stood in the entrance hall, and was cleared twice daily.

"When the porter made his round to collect the letters this evening, he came to tell me that he could not open the box because the lock was out of order," went on Mr. Whitcomb. "On examination it was found that some one, since middle-day, had attempted to open the box with a key of his own. He broke this key, and we found a piece of it in the lock."

The speaker paused for a moment, as if still expecting a reply to his question.

"No one has any right to meddle with that box," he continued. "If a boy wishes to recover possession of a letter he has posted, he must come to me, and ask that the door may be unlocked; then, if he can show by the handwriting on the envelope that the letter is actually one of his own posting, he can have it back. That box is public property, the same as a pillar-box in the road, and no one, except the person authorised to make the collection, has any right to meddle with its contents."

"Beastly cheek!" whispered Grafton to Mallor. "I wonder who did it?"

"I dare say it would be possible to discover the culprit by ordering every boy

in the room to produce his keys," continued the Head. "Then we should no doubt discover the owner of the one which has been broken. I should be sorry to do that, as I don't for a moment suspect that the boy is a thief. Possibly, after posting his letter, he remembered something which

"That's a cool thing for any one to do," said Grafton, as he and his study-mate returned to their den. "I wonder what he was after."

Mallor shrugged his shoulders. He had noticed something which seemed of greater importance than the broken key.



A moment later, the blue balloon joined the yellow.

he wished he had not written, and tried to get it back. I am willing to take that view of the matter, but what I want to impress on you is that such a thing must not happen again."

The Head paused for a moment, as if to give effect to the words he had just spoken, then strode out of the room.

"I say," he began, "I saw Carth and Berger glaring at you, and whispering to each other as we came into the dining-hall. You'd better watch out; it strikes me those fellows are hatching a plot of some kind, and that you'll hear from them before long."

CHAPTER II

THE AERONAUTIC CLUB

Most boys in the School-house were ready to dismiss the post-box incident from their thoughts as being a matter of no great importance. They decided it was a piece of cool cheek on some one's part, and were relieved that the Head had not made more fuss, and inflicted some penalty on the whole community.

But the mind of one great person was troubled. Talbot, senior prefect, and Head of the House, left the dining-hall with a frown on his face. Instead of retiring to his own study, he betook himself to the sanctum of a friend. Sexton had already won distinction as a scholar. He was secretary of the Debating Society and editor of the school magazine.

"I'd like to speak to you for a minute," began Talbot, closing the door, and dropping into a chair. "I don't know what you think, but to me this attempt to unlock the post-box seems a bit fishy. I can't think why the Head didn't make all the fellows produce their keys. We should have found the broken one in five minutes."

"Oh, I think it's pretty clear why he didn't do that," replied Sexton. "There'd have been a rare old scandal if he had; fellows in the other houses would have invented a report that something had been stolen, and there'd have been a round-up of keys for searching lockers and play-boxes. I think Whitcomb wished to show that he didn't regard it as a case of attempted robbery."

"Yes, but how can you be sure it

wasn't?" growled Talbot, who seemed determined to take a gloomy view of the matter. "There may have been a letter in that box containing a postal order. The blighter might have collared it if he'd got the door open."

Sexton smiled, and shook his head.

"If there had been a postal order in that box it isn't likely that it would have been for any big sum; not one large enough to make it worth while running the risk of being chucked out of the school. There'd be the chance that an order might be traced by the counterfoil; they could tell at what post-office it had been changed, and possibly one of the clerks might remember who handed it in. Besides, we've got some pretty poor specimens in the School-house, I'll admit, but 'pon my soul, I don't believe there are any budding burglars among them."

"Then why do you suppose it was done?"

"I think the same as Whitcomb. Some young ass wrote a letter, and afterwards wished he hadn't, so he tried to get it back."

"But no one's got any right to unlock boxes that don't belong to him," protested Talbot. "A chap must be a wrong 'un to do a thing like that. I've half a mind to go round the dormitories, and make all the fellows show up their keys—do it on my own responsibility."

"I don't think it would be much good. You may depend the owner of the broken key has been sharp enough to take it off his bunch and chuck it away by this time."

"Yes, that's likely enough," admitted Talbot. "It should have been done before the fellows left the dining-hall. You ought to have taken them on the

ground-hop, so to^o speak. Still, I shall make some quiet inquiries, and, if I can find out who it was, I'll give the boulder a dressing down he won't forget in a hurry."

By breakfast time, next day, at least three boys in the School-house no longer felt any interest in the post-box episode. Members of the Lower School Aeronautic Club had something else to think about, for this was the day fixed for the balloon race. They waylaid their President as he was coming out of the dining-hall.

"Well, I'm ready to fill the balloons any time," chuckled the good-natured Holme. "When are you going to send 'em up?"

"We haven't quite decided," replied Short. "We don't want to have a whole crowd herding after us. I believe some of the chaps in the Junior day-room want to turn it into a rag. There's that ass Pelly, for instance; some one told us that he meant to bring his catapult, and pot the balloons as soon as they got on the wing."

"What I think we'd better do," began Gregg, with an air of great wisdom, "is to scoot out directly after dinner, and dash off right to the other side of the playing-field."

"Some one would be sure to see," objected Witney. "You can't be sure that fellows from the other houses won't be out before us. They'd spot what we were carrying, and they'd be after us like a pack of hounds."

"Why don't you do it in our yard?" suggested Holme.

"When?"

"I should say the best time would be after tea. Every one clears out of the house these fine evenings; there's always practice going on at the nets."

"Yes, perhaps that would be the best

time," agreed Short. "We could make out we were going to the playing-field, and then double back. But how about the balloons? There won't be room to stick them in our lockers; and, if we leave them in the day-room, some fools will get hold of them, and bust the whole lot."

"Now, see here," returned the "President," "I'll fill them this afternoon in my study, and keep them there till the coast is clear; then I'll bring them to you. I should say you'd better be 'standing by' about ten minutes after the fellows have cleared out of the dining-hall."

The proposal was carried unanimously, and at the time agreed upon Holme entered the cloak-room with three balloons bobbing gaily at the ends of as many short lengths of string. The members of the Aeronautic Club greeted his arrival with a subdued cheer. Fortune seemed inclined to favour their first meeting; they had fooled Pelly completely, and all the other members of the Junior day-room were by this time scattered about the playing-field, blissfully unconscious of the great sight they were about to miss.

"Hold it tight," cautioned Holme, as he handed the yellow balloon to its owner. "There, you young ass—didn't I tell you?"

In his excitement, Short had somehow allowed the string to slip through his fingers, and the balloon promptly rose to the ceiling, along which it bobbed, driven by some gentle current of air.

"You are a duffer!" cried Witney. "Why didn't you—oh, HANG!"

He leapt into the air in an attempt to clutch the piece of string which waggled for an instant above his head; a moment later the blue balloon had joined the

yellow, and the pair were rubbing sides like old friends.

"What's the good of filling balloons for you chaps if you can't hold on to them," laughed Holme. "Go on, Gregg, let yours go, and then the race'll be a dead heat. They can't get through the ceiling."

"Open an umbrella, and see if you can't scoop them down inside it," suggested Gregg wildly. "Make haste, or some one's bound to come along and see them. Climb up on the lockers—see if you can't get a pair of steps. It's no use chucking things at them. What idiots you are!"

"Wait a bit, and I'll get them for you," cried Holme, who, as usual, was never at a loss for an idea. "You'll bust them if you use an open umbrella, the ends of the ribs will do it. Hold hard a minute."

The speaker ran off, and presently returned with a big butterfly-net with a long cane handle, the property of Mallor. The balloons were driven into a corner, and brought down one after the other, wedged in the mouth of the net.

"There, now, tie on the postcards while I take this net back to Mallor's study," ordered the "President." "If one of them gets up to the ceiling again, it'll be disqualified, and won't be allowed to take part in the race."

On his return he found each member of the club clutching his balloon as if his life depended on its safe keeping. The postcards had been attached.

"All ready?" demanded the "President." "Then come on."

The whole party left the cloak-room, but, as they stepped out through the doorway into the yard, the three juniors came to a halt.

"Confound it!" whispered Gregg. "Let's go back. There's that beast Carth. He's sure to start ragging."

At the first glance, Holme had thought the yard was empty; now he caught sight of its solitary occupant, and wondered for a moment what he was doing. Away on the opposite side of the enclosure Carth was standing close to the ivy-covered wall, apparently staring up at one of the study windows, all of which were open. He turned sharply, and seeing the distant group, stared at them for a moment with an odd look like that of a person caught in the act of doing something silly.

"Hallo, was it you who called me just now?" he cried.

"No, I've only just this moment come out of the cloak-room," answered Holme.

Carth nodded, and came strolling across the gravel with his hands in his pockets. The members of the Aeronautic Club sought protection by clustering behind their "President." To their surprise no notice was taken of them.

"I thought I heard some one call me from one of those windows," said Carth. "It must have been a chap shouting on the other side of the house."

He passed on into the cloak-room, and with a sigh of relief the small boys marched on into the centre of the yard. Here they ranged themselves in a line about six feet apart, the balloons bobbing about in the gentle evening breeze.

"Now, when I say 'Go!'" began Holme.

"Oh, bother! this postcard has come off," interrupted Gregg. "Wait a jiff while I tie it on again."

"Hurry up," bleated Short and Witney in the same breath.



Bang went the balloon, exploding close to his ear.

In nervous haste Gregg made a fresh hole in the card, then put the knife in his mouth, holding it between his teeth with the small blade still open. He passed the string through the postcard, and was tying a knot when, with a playful movement, the balloon bobbed against the sharp point of the knife, and instantly exploded with a bang in its owner's face. Gregg jumped as if he had been shot; blinking his eyes, he staggered and nearly fell backwards.

"You won't win the cup, my boy, that's certain," jeered Short.

"Oh, but that's not fair," protested Gregg, "I ought to have another shot."

Several minutes were wasted as the trio engaged in a heated debate as to whether Gregg should be allowed to buy a fresh

balloon, and to send it up some other night.

"No fear," said Short, "it wouldn't be a fair race; there might be a stronger wind than there is now. You're out of it, and it's your own fault. If you don't know more about balloons than to stick knives into them, you ought not to have joined the club."

"Well, look alive," cried Holme. "I'm not going to stand about here all the evening. Are you two ready? Go!"

The blue balloon rose like a lark, and in less than a minute had disappeared, drifting on a south-westerly course over the School-house roof; but its flight was scarcely noticed, all eyes being fixed on its rival. Exactly what was wrong with the yellow balloon only an expert could

have told; it circled round, made a dive as if intending to return to earth, then changed its mind, and floated off towards the ivy-clad wall. For an instant it hovered before one of the open windows, then sailed on, and disappeared inside the study itself.

Prawle, a worshipful member of the Upper Sixth, sat at his table writing a letter. He became conscious that his neck was being tickled, then something, which, viewed out of the corner of his eye, had the appearance of a yellow jelly-fish, touched him on the cheek.

"Yup!" gasped the astonished Prawle.

Involuntarily he struck at the monster with his right hand, the point of his pen pierced the inflated skin, and *Bang* went the balloon, exploding close to his ear.

Prawle nearly fell off his chair. For a moment he stared about him wondering what had happened, then he caught sight of a postcard lying on the floor by his side. He picked it up, studied it for a few moments, then rose and rushed to the open window.

"Hallo, Holme, what are you and those kids playing at, I'd like to know?"

Holme, being doubled up with laughter, was unable to reply, but the three juniors rushed forward to explain. The muffled sound of the explosion had informed them that the yellow balloon was now out of the race.

"Well, the next time you play the fool keep your rubbish to yourselves," said Prawle tartly. "Wait a minute——"

He vanished from the window. Presently he reappeared, and tossed the postcard down into the yard.

"I've done as you asked," he snapped.

On the back of the card had been written

the request: "Will the finder of the card kindly state where it was found and drop it in the post?" In the blank space below was scribbled in pencil: "Picked up in my study at the School-house, Claverhill College.—H. G. Prawle."

"My balloon's won," cried Witney. "You chaps can go into town to-morrow morning, and buy me the cup."

"Don't you be in such a hurry," retorted Gregg. "You can't claim you've won till that postcard comes back to say where the balloon got to. That was the rule we made, wasn't it, Short?"

"Oh, rather," answered Short, "that's only fair."

The three members of the club retired in the direction of the cloak-room, still hotly debating the question as to whether the blue balloon had won. Holme lingered for a few moments, shaking with mirth, then strolled off to the playing-field, where he presently encountered Grafton and Mallor.

"Well, old box-of-tricks, what have you been doing?" asked Grafton.

Holme gave a graphic account of the balloon race.

"By the way," he concluded, "when we went out into the yard there was that fellow Carth, standing close to the wall, staring up at your study window. I didn't think of it at the time, but I remembered later that Mallor spotted him doing the same thing yesterday evening. Carth said he thought some one had called to him from one of the studies, but I think that was just made up on the spur of the moment. I wonder what he was doing?"

"He's up to some game, trying to think of a way he can pay this man out for giving him a ducking," suggested Mallor.

"Oh, I think he'll be wise enough to leave me alone," laughed Grafton. "We'll keep a tumbler full of water handy; then, if we spot him hanging about again, we'll chuck it over him, and give him a shower bath."

CHAPTER III

QUEER DOINGS

IT has been the lot of most pioneers to be ridiculed by those unable to appreciate their great ideals, and such was the fate of the founders of the Aeronautic Club. The Junior day-room, on hearing the result of the first balloon race, simply rocked with laughter.

"Good thing you weren't in the car of your balloon, Short, when it sailed into Prawle's study," piped a shrill voice. "He'd have spanked you first, and then chucked you out of the window."

"Well, mine went up all right," asserted Witney. "Everybody can't win the same race, so you can't say this one was a failure."

For a whole day what had become of the blue balloon remained a mystery, then, on Saturday morning, a crowd collected round the table in the entrance hall on which the contents of the post-bag were displayed.

"Where is he?" was the cry. "Hi—Witney!—here's something for you."

Lying amidst the letters was the post-card which had been attached to the blue balloon. In addition to the English stamp with which it had originally been furnished it was now plastered about with a number of foreign ones, French, Swiss, and Italian, which it was easy to see had been supplied

from some youngster's collection of "swops." "Picked up on the top of Mount Blanc," were the words scribbled in pencil on the space intended for the message. The finder's name was not given.

The crowd raised an ironical cheer.

"Hooray, this man's won the cup," they cried. "Some one ought to send an account of it to the papers, and show other schools what we're doing at Claverhill."

Anxious to avoid the chaff of the Junior day-room, the three members of the Aeronautic Club hurried out of doors, and took refuge in a quiet corner of the quad.

"I'll bet you it was that young ass Pelly who did it," growled Short. "I saw him grinning while we were at breakfast, and I wondered what was the joke."

"Well, I reckon I've won the cup," declared Witney. "My balloon went farther than either of yours."

"Get away, some one must have picked it up in the playing-field," protested Gregg. "I expect it drifted into one of the trees, then some idiot brought it down with a stone."

"It got out of our yard, it got clear of the School-house—must have," said Witney firmly.

"Oh, that's nonsense," cried Short. "For all you know it may have sailed round, and come back into the School-house through the front door. You needn't think that you've won that cup, because you haven't."

Gregg was of the same opinion, and after further dispute Witney withdrew his claim to the coveted trophy.

"All right," he said, "we'll make it a rule, if we have another race, no balloon stands a chance of winning the prize unless

it gets outside the school grounds. What's more, we won't start from the yard; we'll go round to that clear space behind the Fives Court."

The "President" of the Aeronautic Club did not share in the fun over the amazing flight of the blue balloon. At the time when the postcard, alleged to have been picked up on the top of Mount Blanc, was causing such merriment round the post table, Holme was talking to Grafton in the latter's study.

"When's Mallor coming back?" asked Holme.

"Oh, I'm expecting him every minute; he said he should be back in time for morning school. Lucky beggar, there's some sense in having a sister if you can get a day off to go to her wedding."

"It's to be hoped he'll bring back a good big lump of bride-cake. So you had this study all to yourself yesterday?"

Grafton nodded, and uncorked a bottle of ink to fill his fountain pen.

"Look here," he said suddenly, as if struck with a bright idea, "d'you remember that booby-trap you once made for old Joep? Well, couldn't we rig up something of the sort to give Mallor a welcome home? You see that mug—it's what I've been keeping handy in case Carth comes messing round again. Mallor's bound to be feeling flat after the wedding festivities, and it might cheer him up a bit to have half a pint of cold water descend on his head as he steps inside the dear old study."

"No, my boy, you won't get me to invent any more booby-traps, or burglar alarms," laughed Holme. "I've gone out of the business as far as that sort of thing is concerned."

"But to oblige an old friend——"

"No, not even to drench one of my oldest friends. Nothing doing, I tell you."

A knock came at the door, and a small boy poked his head into the room.

"The Head sent me to find you, Grafton. He wants to see you now, at once, in his study."

"Right-o!" was the cheerful reply.

In days of yore the summons might have caused Grafton a feeling of anxiety lest some minor offence, or failure in Form work, had been reported to the "old man," but, knowing he had what a soldier would call a "clean conduct sheet," he started off, merely wondering why the Head Master should wish to see him. Possibly the interview would have some bearing on his promotion to prefect next term.

Mr. Whitcomb glanced up from a letter he was writing as his study door opened, and laid aside his pen.

"Ah, Grafton," he murmured; then, "What time did you go to bed last night?" he inquired.

"The usual time, sir," answered the visitor, puzzled at the question.

"At ten o'clock?"

"Yes, sir."

"Members of the Sixth enjoy the privilege of staying up half an hour later than boys lower in the school. I suppose you didn't fall asleep over a book you were reading, and wake up to find you'd over-shot the mark?"

"No, sir; I went to bed when the other fellows in the study corridor passed on."

"I see, by the list, that you share No. 5 study with Mallor. Wasn't he away last night?"

"Yes, sir, he had leave to go home to his sister's wedding."

"Well, now, I'd better tell you how the

matter stands," began Mr. Whitcomb. "I went last evening to Stenbridge, where I had been asked to take the chair at a meeting in the village. When the meeting was over I went to the house of a friend. Owing to a mistake in the date of a timetable which we consulted, I missed the last train, and was obliged to walk home.

by counting the windows. I didn't know it was yours till after I'd referred to the list. The point is, the gas was burning; for that reason I asked you if you knew how late you were in going to bed."

Grafton stood knitting his brows, unable to make head or tail of the problem.



"What time did you go to bed last night?" he inquired.

That made me very late in getting back. Remembering something I had told one of the men to do, I stepped out into the yard to see if my orders had been executed, and, looking up, I noticed there was a light burning in your study."

"In mine, sir?"

"Yes, in No. 5. I saw which it was

"What time was it, sir—when you saw the light?" he inquired.

"I can't tell you the exact minute, but I should say it was about a quarter-past twelve. I entered the house, but, by the time I got round to your study, it was in darkness."

"I know nothing about it, sir," said,

Grafton. "I suppose you didn't make a mistake in counting the windows?"

"That's quite a reasonable thing to suggest," replied the Head with a smile. "I fancied, myself, I might have entered the wrong study, but I put my hand on the gas-globe, and it was warm, showing that the light had not long been extinguished. Needless to say, I afterwards went along the corridor, but there was no one in any of the other studies. You didn't lie awake, and come down from your dormitory to fetch something—a book, for instance?"

"No, sir."

"Why I mention a book is that I lit the gas in No. 5, and noticed a novel lying open on the table—Stevenson's *St. Ives*. It looked as if it had been thrown aside by some one who had left the room in a hurry."

"I was reading that book before I went to bed, sir, but I give you my word that I went on with the other fellows at ten o'clock."

"Very well; you'd better find out, if you can, who was in your study at the time I saw the light burning. It's no use my sending for Mallor, as he was absent from the school."

"You see, Grafton," the speaker continued, after a pause, "fellows in the Sixth enjoy certain privileges because they have reached an age when it is to be hoped they can, to some extent, be relied upon to rule themselves. You had better mention this to the person who was in your study. You may go."

Grafton withdrew with an uneasy feeling that the message was intended for himself rather than to be passed on to some unknown defendant.

"I believe he still thinks it was me," he pondered. "Who on earth could have been dodging round the studies at that time of night?"

There was no time before morning school to attempt to fathom the mystery, but, during "break," Grafton interviewed all the owners of studies in the School-house, and put to them the same inquiry. From all he received the same reply; each individual declared that he had gone to bed at the proper time, and had not left his dormitory during the night. Prawle's suggestion was that what the Head had mistaken for a light in one of the studies must have been a ray of moonlight reflected on the window-pane; but reference to an almanac showed that the nights were dark, a new moon being due in about a week's time. The solution of the puzzle was as far off as ever.

Excitement over a cricket match prevented much notice being taken of Grafton's queer story, and by most of the seniors it was forgotten before middle-day. The incident, however, continued to rankle in the breast of the person chiefly concerned, and the subject was revived when the three old friends met in No. 5 study for a gossip after tea.

"I almost wish I'd told the Head that I'd done what he suggested—gone to sleep in my chair," growled Grafton. "He'd have believed what I said, and let me off with a caution. As it is, I'm almost sure he thinks I'm a liar."

"You might have said that you went to sleep because I wasn't here to see you safe off to bye-bye," laughed Mallor.

"Oh, it's no joke. He thinks, because I'm not even in the House Eleven, I'm not

a good enough sportsman to tell him the truth."

"But just now you said you wished you'd told him a lie."

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Grafton testily. "You may thank your stars you were away at that wedding, or Whitcomb would have been down on you too, my boy."

There was a silence, broken at length by Holme.

"D'you think it was Carth?" he asked.

"Carth?" echoed Grafton.

"Yes, the chap for whose benefit you've been keeping a mug of water handy. I told you I saw him down in the yard gazing up at your window; and, before that, Mallor noticed him and Berger doing the same thing. I think some one suggested that Carth meant to chuck a rock into the study to pay you out for giving him that ducking. Perhaps he came here last night to carry out his fell design some other way."

"I see what you mean," murmured Grafton. "Hum—I doubt very much if Carth would have the pluck to come downstairs in the middle of the night."

"Have any of your things been smashed?"

Grafton and Mallor gazed round the study as if to make sure that all their possessions were intact. No trace of damage was to be seen.

"I haven't noticed anything wrong," began Mallor, "but I'm almost certain those two fellows, Carth and Berger, have been hatching a plot of some kind. I told Grafton he'd better watch out."

"D'you think the beggar's done something which we shall find out later on?" began Grafton. "Put a sort of time-bomb somewhere, which'll go off when the

acid has eaten through the copper wire—see what I mean? Now, Holme, you're the man for all kinds of diabolical inventions. Tell us what you think he could have done."

"He might have stowed away a dead rat behind the books in the top shelf of your book-case," chuckled Holme. "That's the only soft of 'time-bomb' I can imagine Carth would have the brains to invent."

To the speaker's surprise and inward amusement, his playful suggestion was taken seriously. Grafton and Mallor removed all the books from the shelves, and then routed out the contents of their cupboard, but no dead rat could they find.

"I only said that in joke," laughed Holme. "On second thoughts, I don't believe it was Carth. It stands to reason if he'd meant to come to your study last night he'd have had his little plot all cut and dried beforehand. It wouldn't have taken him long to perform his trick, and you'd have found the result of it by this time."

"I'm not so sure it wasn't Carth," said Grafton. "I've a jolly good mind to go after him now, take him by the scruff of the neck, and ask him what he was up to last night."

"I shouldn't do that," objected Mallor. "Whether he'd done it or not, he'd swear he'd never been near this study, and you couldn't prove anything different. You'd simply be making yourself look a fool."

For a few moments Grafton hung in the wind, as if still inclined to rush off and force a confession from Carth; then he decided to take his friend's advice.

"If it wasn't Carth, then it must have been some silly ass who goes about walking in his sleep," he growled.

Holme prepared to retire to his own study.

"That's just what you may depend it was," he called back, as he stepped out, into the passage. "What's more, if this sleep-walker goes about striking matches, and lighting the gas, it won't be long before he sets the whole show on fire, and that'll be the end of all our troubles."

With which cheerful prediction the conference ended.

CHAPTER IV

"WATER POLO"

PAWLE sat at his study table, leaning back in his chair, and staring up at the ceiling with a heavy frown on his face. No stranger who had caught a glimpse of him at the present moment could have believed that Pawle was a humorist, yet he was quite a wag in his way, and Sexton, the editor of the *Journal*, always looked to him to furnish a page of facetious comments on current events, which contribution had become a popular feature of the magazine.

"Hang it all, what on earth is there to write about?" groaned the humorist.

He had received a hint that his "copy" would shortly be required to be sent to the printers, and not a single note had as yet been made. Last term he had experienced no difficulty in finding material—the state of the football field after a fortnight's steady downpour of rain—the obstacle race at the sports—pancakes—the proposal to remodel the fire brigade, all these had provided subjects for a jest, but since the

Easter holidays nothing at all funny seemed to have happened. Through the open door came the sound of a voice speaking in the corridor; Pawle listened to it for a few moments, hardly conscious of what he was doing, then there flashed into his mind a sudden idea. He sprang from his chair, and dashed out into the corridor.

"Holme!" he called, "come here a minute, I want to speak to you."

"Well, what is it?" inquired Holme, as he entered the jester's study.

"You were outside in the yard the other night when those kids were fooling about with those toy balloons," began Pawle. "One of the blessed things came sailing in through my window, with a postcard tied to its tail. What did the young beggars imagine they were doing?"

"My dear sir, that was the first meeting of the Lower School Aeronautic Club, of which I'm 'President.'"

"The *what* club?"

Holme explained, and described the manner in which it had been proposed to conduct the race. As he listened, Pawle's face grew radiant.

"I say, this is topping," he murmured. "I'd no idea that there was a club of that sort in the school. It's immense—we must get them to do it again."

"What, to sail another balloon in through your study window?"

"No, to have another race. I'd like to be there so that I can write a short account of it for the *Journal*."

"Why not write about the first race?"

"Oh, no, it all came to grief. We must have another."

"I don't know if they mean to try it again," replied Holme with a grin. "They

won't want to waste their money getting more balloons."

"I'll pay for the balloons," cried Prawle. "I'll join the club; I don't know what the entrance fee is, but here's a bob. Give it to them, and tell them they must arrange to have another race as soon as ever they can."

"Are you going to be one of the competitors?"

"No fear; I'll be one of the committee, or an honorary member—whatever they like as long as I'm there to see the race."

"I'm just going off to bathe," laughed Holme, who had a towel under his arm. "I'll get on their tracks after dinner. Mind you, I can't promise that they'll agree to have another race; they're a bit sore about the last one, but it ought to buck them up getting a new member."

What was sometimes referred to as the "bathing-parade" had mustered some time ago, and when Holme arrived at the river the dressing-shed was empty, the boys who had thronged it a few minutes earlier being now in the water. The latecomer performed a "lightning change," and stepped out into the sunshine just in time to witness a scene which might have provided Prawle with a subject for one of his notes.

The pool was crowded, and on the bank stood a senior named Abbot. He was fully dressed, being under orders not to bathe till he was rid of a severe cold from which he was suffering. Struck with a sudden thought, he put his hand in his pocket, and drew forth an old tennis ball.

"Hi!" he shouted. "Look out for it—'water polo.'"

With a jerk of his arm he sent the ball flying through the air; it soared aloft, then fell with a splash in the centre of the pool.

The scene which followed beat Abbot's fondest expectations, and pleased him immensely. Half a dozen swimmers instantly made a dash for the ball, while as many more, who happened to be at a greater distance, quickened their stroke, and steered in the same direction. No one seemed to have the faintest notion of the rules of water polo, and, since there were no goals or selected teams, it was hardly likely that the contest should bear any resemblance to the regulation game. The one idea seemed to be that the player in possession of the ball must be seized and thrust under water. The space being so confined, it was impossible to escape capture; it was like playing rugger on a small croquet lawn. The centre of the pool was lashed into foam; hoarse cries, which mostly ended with a *gufgle*, rent the air, and small boys made for the safety of the banks, where they arrived like half-drowned puppies.

"Go it!" shouted Abbott. "Pass to your backs, and backs feed your forwards."

As no one had the slightest idea what position he was supposed to occupy, the game continued as before. It might have been supposed that the river had recently been "stocked" with sharks, which were now tearing one another to pieces in a fierce conflict for some choice morsel of food. Soon all eyes were streaming with water; it was impossible to distinguish who had the ball, and now the only rule was for each player to duck the man nearest to him. The sport was too strenuous to last many minutes, and presently, as if by mutual consent, the combatants dispersed, for the most part to lie floating on their backs, gasping for breath.

"Jolly good," cried Abbot. "Chuck me the ball, some one, and you shall try

'swimming up'; that's what you might call the 'kick-off' in water polo.

"Now," he continued, "make a line at the end of the pool, and I'll pitch the ball in from where I'm standing. Then you'll race for it; don't start till you hear me shout 'Go!'"

The suggestion might not have been followed had it not appealed to a burly giant named Burse, who was a good swimmer, and foot-skipper at Westons.

"Right! line up, you fellows," he laughed. "Whoever gets the ball shall be Captain of Water Polo."

Bathers who felt they had had quite enough of the new game made for the banks, leaving a clear course for the half a dozen stalwarts who took up their position for the start. A number of small Westonians, confident that their champion would win, raised shrill war-whoops of "Play up, Westons!" which demonstration was followed by somewhat feeble and half-hearted shrieks of defiance from juniors of the School-house.

"Go!" shouted Abbot, and tossed the tennis ball into mid-stream.

A moment later there were frantic yells of "School-house!"—"School-house!"

To the surprise of all beholders, the man who took the lead was not Burse. Half buried in the foam of his powerful racing stroke, Grafton came along with the speed of a destroyer. The rate at which he travelled was a revelation even to an old acquaintance like Holme, who stood gazing with a grin of mingled pride and astonishment. It was useless for small Westonians to scream "Burse!" though they did so till their voices cracked. The School-house man forged steadily ahead; he was six yards in front of his rival when he grabbed

the floating ball, and, had the race been longer, the distance between them would no doubt have been greater.

"Good man," gasped Burse, who was a good enough sportsman to be content that the best man should win. "You do go at a lick. How long could you keep it up?"

"Oh, I don't know," laughed Grafton. "There's not much chance of trying in a slop-basin like this pool."

Hilarious cheers were given as he landed, while elated juniors from the School-house chased small Westonians in the shallows, and splashed them vigorously. Holme advanced and smacked his chum on the back.

"Well swum, sir!" he chuckled. "We ought now to regard ourselves as being two of the most distinguished members of the school. There's myself President of the Aeronautic Club, and you Captain of Water Polo."

Grafton replied with a discontented growl. Somehow he failed to appreciate the joke. This absurd race had only served to remind him that there was no chance at Claverhill for him to show his comrades that there was one form of sport in which he was really proficient. He was frowning when he entered the dressing-shed, a fact which was noticed and afterwards commented upon by Carth and Berger as they started on their walk back to the school.

"Captain of Water Polo," sneered Carth. "He didn't look over pleased at his new honour. That's about all he's good for—silly ass."

"He knew all the fellows were rotting him, and you could see he was boiling with rage."

"By Jove, he'd be in a rage if he knew who was in his study the other night,"

said Carth. "I believe the old man sent for him, and wanted to know what he was doing down there at that time of night. Rather a lark he should think it was Grafton."

Berger's face grew serious, and he strode on a few paces without speaking.

"It was a near shave, my boy," he murmured; "the wonder is you weren't collared."

"It was a jolly good thing the window was open," began Carth; "I heard a sound, and for a moment couldn't think what it was; then I twigged there was some one moving about in the yard."

"Did you guess who it was?"

"I didn't trouble to think.. I knew, whoever he was, he'd see there was a light in the study. I can tell you it sort of sent a chill down my back. I turned out the gas, and scooted for all I was worth."

"You might have run straight into his arms."

"That's about what I should have done if I hadn't been jolly quick. After he saw the light he must have come indoors, and made a bee-line for the studies; I hadn't a second to spare. He came into the entrance hall just as I got to the top of the stairs."

"Wonder he didn't hear you."

"Oh, I stopped dead, and crouched down as still as a mouse. I never moved till he got into the study corridor; I could tell by his step that it was Whitcomb."

"It's a nuisance he should have gone to that meeting," the speaker continued. "If he hadn't, he'd have been snug in bed instead of prowling about down in that yard. Just knocked the bottom out of my innocent little scheme. I should

have brought it off, I'll bet you, if I'd had another five minutes."

There was a pause.

"Well, it's got to be done some time," muttered Berger.

"You won't catch me going down to that study again in the night; it's too risky," declared Carth. "We shall have to be jolly careful what we're about."

CHAPTER V

A RACE TO THE RESCUE

"It's going to be fine," said Mallor, with a satisfied glance at the blue sky. "I was afraid the weather would have broken before now."

It was Wednesday morning, the 5th of July, a date of importance to members of the Natural History Society, since they had been invited to see the famous aviary and other objects of interest at Hedwith Grange, the residence of Sir Edwin Carlace, a retired shipowner. Grafton and Holme had linked arms with the "bug-hunter" as they left the dining-hall after breakfast, and all three had strolled out into the quad.

"How did you get the invitation?" asked Holme. "I didn't know that Carlace took any interest in the college."

"Oh, it was our old friend Mr. Newent worked it. He knows Sir Edwin, and told him all about the society, and that he himself has been an honorary member ever since it was started."

"Told him about the camera-gun, I suppose," suggested Grafton.

All three laughed as their minds travelled,

back to the days when they were youngsters in the Lower School.

"Every member is allowed to take a friend with him. So there's a chance for one of you to come with me," said Mallor.

"I can't go, as I have an important engagement," replied Holme, with a grin. "As President of the Aeronautic Club I've got to superintend the start of another balloon race after dinner. There's great excitement as to who will win the cup; two new members have joined the club, and Prawle has promised to add a 'purse' of fourpence to the prize."

"When we get back we shall find all the trees in the playing field decorated with your silly balloons," laughed Mallor. "Well, you aren't one of the aeronauts, Grafton, so you'd better come."

Grafton shrugged his shoulders; he seemed rather disgruntled about something. His glum look at breakfast had provoked an inquiry from the senior who sat next him if some one had put salt in his tea.

"How far is it to the Grange?" he inquired.

"Oh, not far, not more than a couple of miles. It's about half-way to Stenbridge, or a bit less. Quite an easy walk."

"Are you supposed to go rigged out in your Sunday best?"

"Bless you, no; wear flannels. You'd better come; the house and grounds are worth seeing, if you aren't interested in the aviary."

Grafton hesitated for a moment, and stood grinding his heel into the gravel.

"I feel I'd like to get out of this place if it's only for the afternoon," he muttered.

"All right, old chap. I'll come. I don't

suppose I look much like a learned naturalist, but you can lend me that old butterfly net of yours to carry as a disguise."

"Then that's settled," cried Mallor. "Be ready to start sharp at a quarter-past two."

The Natural History Society mustered in full force for the outing; Mr. Moore, one of the junior masters, being in charge of the party. A gentle breeze tempered the heat, and the two-mile tramp was enlivened with lively chatter, one of the jokes being a question as to whether a member named Hawk would be allowed inside the aviary. The juniors quieted down, a little awestruck, as the party entered the massive gates and passed on up the long carriage drive leading to the Grange. There was, however, no need for any one to feel nervous. Sir Edwin and Lady Carlace welcomed the visitors in the most kindly manner, insisting on their partaking of iced lemonade after their walk.

The big entrance hall in which the refreshment was served was adorned with antlers, and other hunting trophies, while in a corner stood a large grizzly bear, reared up on its hind legs in the most life-like manner. Grafton and Mallor were examining it when some one spoke.

"Rather an ugly customer to meet on a dark night in a narrow lane, eh?"

The two boys turned, and saw their host standing behind them. His face was bronzed with wind and sunshine, and his eyes twinkled with fun.

"Did you shoot it, sir?" asked Grafton.

"No, my brother Robert shot it," was the reply. "I tell him he's never happy unless he has a gun or a fishing-rod in his hand, and he could spin you some fine yarns about big game hunting. He's

outside somewhere, but he's rather deaf, so you'll have to speak up if you want to talk to him."

What might be called the serious business of the afternoon commenced with a visit to the aviary, then followed an inspection of the orchid house, and a tour round the gardens. At length the visitors were

"I hope they'll give us our tea in some bigger cups than those," laughed Mallor. "I'm feeling thirsty again already."

"Has Sir Edwin got any children?"

"Only one, a girl called Lucy; he married rather late in life, so she's only a kid. Moore was saying that he'd seen her out riding on a pony."



"Now, are you ready?"

informed that they might wander where they liked about the grounds till five o'clock, when tea would be ready.

Grafton and Mallor strolled off along a terrace overlooking the tennis lawns; presently they reached a rustic summer house, and peering inside saw a doll's tea-set scattered about on the table.

"I expect she can get whatever she wants out of her father. They say he's rolling in money, but he's a jolly good sort. Doesn't put on side."

The two friends descended some stone steps, walked round the tennis lawns, and came to a halt, gazing out over a wide expanse of park land. Beyond a

distant belt of trees a glimpse was obtained of what looked like a silver mirror which lay flashing in the sun.

"That must be the lake," said Grafton. "Come on, let's have a look at it. Sir Edwin told us we could go where we liked."

They clambered over some iron railings, and tramped on, side by side, across the grass.

"I'm glad you asked me to come," murmured Grafton. "I was feeling fed up with the school."

"Why, what's been the matter with you all day?"

"Oh, everything's rotten. To begin with, it seems the Head isn't satisfied about that light he saw burning the other night. He's been talking to Talbot about it—asked him if any of the fellows in the study corridor are in the habit of staying up after ten o'clock. That put Talbot in a paddy. He called me into his study just before breakfast, and gave me no end of a jawing."

"It wasn't your doing."

"Of course it wasn't, but I believe Whitcomb and Talbot have both got it into their heads that I came down to our study for some reason or other that night, or that I'd never been to bed. Talbot said: 'If you will play the fool, we shall all have to suffer for it.' I said I didn't play the fool, and he rounded on me with 'Yes, you do; you were playing the fool and kicking up a shine down at the bathing pool on Wednesday morning.'

"Did he mean the 'water polo'?"

"That's it, and if any one was to blame it was Abbot. Talbot himself wasn't there, but he'd heard some wild yarn that I'd proclaimed myself 'Captain of 'Water Polo' and swum about the pool

ducking every one I could lay hands on. He wouldn't have talked to me like that if I'd been in the Eleven, but he thinks I'm a hopeless sort of rotter, and he can slang me as much as he pleases. I can tell you I'm glad my time at the college is nearly up. I wish I was leaving this sumpier."

"We've had some good times together—you and I and Holme," said Mallor. "Next term you'll be a prefect."

"I doubt it," growled Grafton. "I think whatever good opinion Whitcomb may have had of me is gone now. He'd never make a prefect of a man who he believed was a liar."

Passing through the belt of trees they wended their way along a footpath, through a shrubbery, and at length reached the side of the lake. It was a big sheet of water, circular in shape, with a small island in the centre. Close to this island a small boat was moored, from which an elderly man was fishing, while, seated in the stern, was a little girl wearing a sailor cap and a white flannel jumper.

"I suppose that's Sir Edwin's youngster, and the man must be her Uncle Robert who shot the bear," said Grafton. "Let's wait a bit and see if he catches anything. They won't notice us if we stand here behind these shrubs."

For five minutes the two friends watched the angler, who sat puffing a big pipe with his eyes fixed on the tip of a quill float. Presently he lifted his rod, and in the stillness could be heard the purr of his reel as he lengthened his line for a longer cast. Exactly how it happened the two boys did not see; but possibly "Uncle Robert" forgot that the island was so close behind him, the line flew back over his head, and the next instant became

taut as a bowstring as the hook and a portion of the gut trace caught in a bush.

"He's hung up," said Grafton. "He'll break his tackle if he isn't careful."

The angler tried a little coaxing, then, finding this of no avail, he lifted the boat's anchor, paddled to the island with one of the oars, and stepped ashore. He knelt down with his back to the water, and commenced the task of freeing his line.

"He doesn't want to break the gut," remarked Mallor. "He'll find it a job if——"

The speech was interrupted by an ejaculation from Grafton. "Hallo!--what's that?"

Mallor turned his head, and, following the direction of his comrade's pointing finger, saw in the distance a purple globe floating in the air, while beneath it fluttered what might have been an enormous white butterfly.

"Is it something escaped out of the aviary?" asked Grafton.

"No fear," laughed Mallor. "It's one of our Aeronautic Club's balloons, I'm blest if it isn't. You can see the postcard hanging from it. Fancy its coming all this way. This beggar ought to win the cup."

"What a lark; we shall have something to tell Holme when we get back," chuckled Grafton. "But I don't think it's going much farther; looks to me as if the gas is escaping, and it's coming down."

The balloon was indeed nearing the end of its flight; carried by the gentle breeze, it drifted over the lake, sinking every moment as if exhausted after its journey.

"I believe it's going to land on the island," said Mallor.

For some moments this seemed likely

to prove the case, but the purple globe sank lower still, and alighted on the water within a few feet of the boat. Hardly had it done so when the little girl in the sailor cap turned her head, and catching sight of the balloon gave a cry of joyful surprise, no doubt wondering where this amazing thing had come from. The fisherman still remained crouching in front of the bush, absorbed in the work of breaking off twigs round which the end of his line was tangled.

"It'll stay there till it sinks," said Grafton. "The postcard's under water, and will keep it from being carried any farther."

It seemed strange to them afterwards that they should have stood watching the derelict with a feeling only of mild amusement; no presentiment came to either of them of impending tragedy, and the thing itself had happened almost before they realised the danger. The little girl changed her seat, and, stretching out her arm attempted to reach the balloon. It was just a few inches beyond her finger tips. The boat heeled over to her weight, as she leant still farther over the side.

"Look out--mind what you're about!" yelled Grafton. "My stars! She's done it--she's overboard!"

In that dreadful moment one thought after another flashed through Mallor's brain. He saw the splash, and wondered why the man on the island did not turn and spring to the rescue; then he remembered that Mr. Robert Carlace was deaf, and was, therefore, quite unconscious of what had transpired. The boat rocked gently as it recovered an even keel, but of the little girl who had fallen from it not a sign was to be seen. It is a mistake to

suppose that a drowning person always rises to the surface three times. The child was gone, and the swiftness with which she had disappeared somehow made the catastrophe seem all the more appalling.

"What can we do?" gasped Mallor.

Grafton's reply was not in words. He dashed between the bushes behind which the pair had been standing, paused an instant to kick off his shoes, then plunged into the lake.

To Mallor as to many other fellows at Claverhill, "swimming" had meant a few breast strokes, then turning over on one's back and doing "steamers;" now he was to learn what it meant to swim in deadly earnest, and when every second was a thousand times more precious than all the silver cups ever competed for at Claverhill College. Grafton's flannels did not seem to impede him any more than an ordinary bathing suit. He tore through the water with a display of furious energy which would have astonished those who had hitherto been inclined to regard him as a slacker.

"Will he do it?"

The question filled Mallor's mind, though he was scarcely conscious of his own thoughts. He stood as if spellbound, his heart thumping, and his eyes glued on the water round the boat. Once he fancied he saw something white, as if the flannel jumper had risen close to the surface, but of this he could not be sure. The splashing sound grew fainter as the distance increased. The swimmer was more than half-way—he was nearing his goal—he was nearer still—he was there! The tumult of his racing stroke suddenly ceased as he drew a long breath, then dived.

"He can see under water—he told me he could," gasped Mallor. "A—ah!"

Grafton's head and shoulders had reappeared, the way he had lost his full freedom of action showed at once that he was burdened. He was swimming on his back now, and, when within a few feet of the island he shouted—a hoarse, inarticulate yell. This time "Uncle Robert" heard the sound, and turned his head. He took in the situation at a glance, and, though the sight must have proved a shock even to the iron nerves of a big game hunter, he never lost his head. Without a moment's pause he sprang to the bank.

"Hold on!" he cried. "I'll give you a hand. There—now you're all right."

Mallor gave a sigh of relief which changed into a groan when he saw the child lifted on to the island. It was clear that she was unconscious, if not dead. The one thing which made the sight endurable was the behaviour of Robert Carlace. He did not waste a second asking questions, and it was evident he knew exactly what to do. He laid the little girl face downwards on the ground, then turned her over on her back, and began with Grafton's aid to perform artificial respiration.

"Is she alive?" cried Mallor, but no notice was taken of his call.

How long the suspense lasted he could not have told, every five minutes seemed an hour. He waited until he could endure the strain no longer.

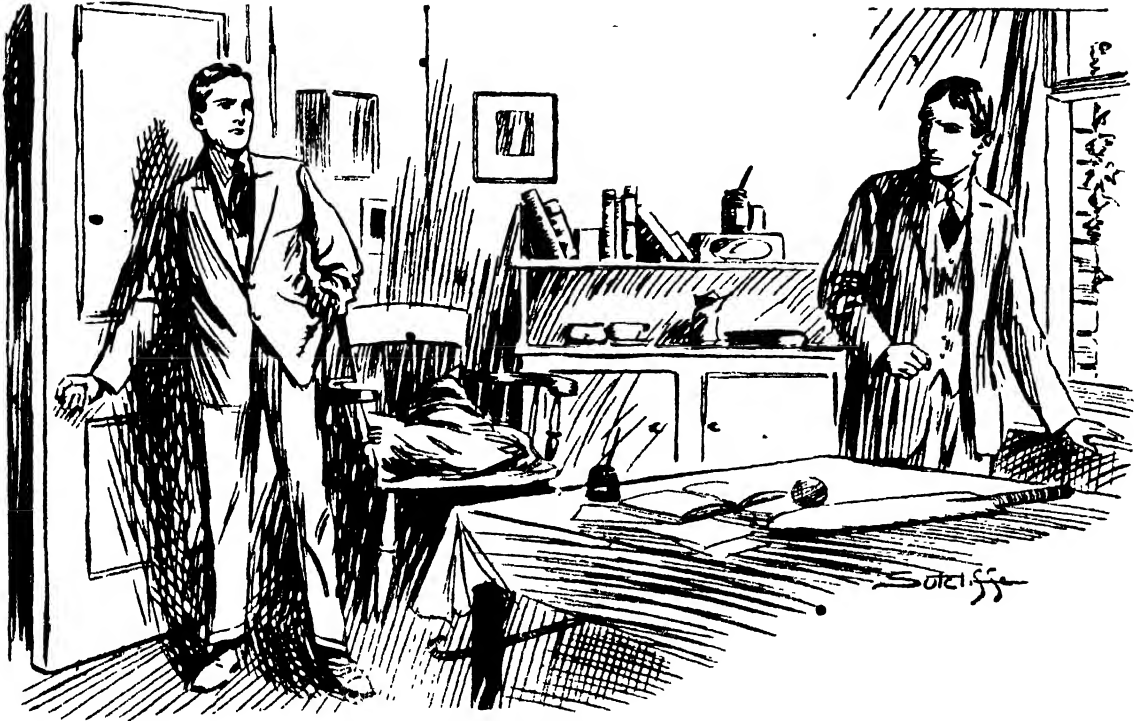
"Grafton!" he yelled. "Grafton!"

The Captain of Water Polo looked round, and waved his hand.

"She's alive!" he called. "She's breathing."

"Can I do anything? Can I be of any help?"

Grafton repeated the question in the deaf man's ear. Still working the child's



"What are you doing here?" demanded Holme.

arms, Robert Carlace turned his head, and his deep voice boomed across the water.

"Run to the house and fetch some blankets, a drop of brandy, and a hot-water bottle—two, if you can get them filled quickly. Look sharp."

Mallor was on the move when the voice called again:—

"Hi!—don't alarm them more than you can help. Say Lucy fell in the lake, and has been rescued by your friend."

CHAPTER VI

CLEAN BOWLED

AT a quarter-past two a full muster of the Lower School Aeronautic Club assembled

SB.AN.

on the patch of waste ground behind the Fives Courts. Prawle, notebook in hand, was in high spirits, and rather inclined to usurp Holme's authority as "President." Prawle was by this time so much in love with his scheme that he had persuaded a youth named Jeffery to attend with a hand camera, the idea being that the editor of the *Journal* might be persuaded to illustrate the humorous account of the race with the reproduction of a photograph.

"First we'll have a group," cried Prawle. "Holme and I will sit on the grass, and you kids arrange yourselves in a semi-circle behind us."

Jeffery paced the distance, and adjusted the focusing screw of his camera.

"Try to look as handsome as you can,"

G

he pleaded. "I don't want to break the lens. Now, are you all ready?"

"No," shouted Prawle. "By *Joye*, there's something I've forgotten."

He sprang to his feet, stood staring round him for a few moments, then dashed to a heap of rubble, and returned with a brick in his hand. He resumed his seat, stood the brick on end between himself and Holme, and upon it placed an enamelled iron egg-cup which he produced from his pocket.

"No use putting this on the ground or it wouldn't be seen," he explained. "There, that represents the challenge cup which the losers are going to present to the winner. It's a bit bigger, I believe, than the cup itself, but that won't matter. And, wait a moment, here's my purse, here's fourpence which I'll pile up in front of the cup. There, that gives what you might call *tone* to the group."

"Ready?" inquired Jeffery. "Don't stick your legs out so far, Holme, or the view will be all your boots. Now, *are* you ready?"

The click of the shutter was followed by a sigh of relief. It may here be said that the photograph, when developed, proved quite a good one. Both Prawle and Holme had broad grins on their faces, while the expression of the youthful "aeronauts" behind them was unusually solemn, as if they regarded themselves as brainy pioneers, and writers of a fresh page of school history. But a second snapshot, taken of the start itself, was a failure, Jeffery's shutter being not quick enough to deal with moving objects. The balloons, a moment after liberation, resembled huge Bologna sausages, falling from the sky on the heads of a group of astonished small boys. Sad to relate, Sexton firmly refused

to allow either of the pictures to appear in the *Journal*, and dropped them both into his waste-paper basket.

There were no disasters such as had occurred in the School-house yard. Set free in a wider space, the balloons rose gaily into the air, and sailed away until visible only as coloured specks against the sky.

"Hooray!" cried Short, "they're all going strong, and now all we've got to do is to wait for the postcards."

"Shan't wait after the holidays have begun, if we don't get 'em before then," said Gregg, and the gathering slowly dispersed.

Holme and Prawle strolled off to the senior ground, where a scratch match had just commenced—"Sixth v. School and Masters." They chose a shady spot, and lay down to watch the game. Time went on, and it must have been about half-past four when Prawle rose to his feet.

"I'm going to have a look at the scores," he said. "Then I think I shall toddle in, and start my notes about the balloon race while it's fresh in my mind."

"All right," replied Holme, "I think I shall come in soon, and tidy up my study—put away the things I used making the gas for those kids."

Prawle set off in the direction of the pavilion, leaving his companion stretched out on the turf. The shady felt hat which Holme was wearing was drawn down well over his forehead, and, from the attitude in which he was lying, two fellows who came strolling by might have fancied he was asleep. They took no notice of him, and continued their conversation.

"It's got to be done, and now's your time," Berger was saying.

"I'm not so sure of that," objected Carth.

"I tell you it is," returned Berger

impatiently. "There's not a soul about. I've just been to see."

Holme recognised the voices, and wondered for a moment what the pair were up to. Turning his head he saw them moving away in the direction of the School-house, then a big hit by one of the players attracted his attention, and for a few minutes his interest remained centred in the game.

"I might as well get a move on now," he muttered. "The Sixth have won, that's certain."

He rose, stretched himself, and walked off across the field. Berger and Carth had disappeared, and he did not trouble to question what had become of them. Silence reigned over the School-house, which seemed entirely deserted. Holme went straight to his study, and prepared to commence work clearing away the things he had used for providing the Aeronautic Club with a supply of hydrogen. He stood for a moment smiling as he wondered what had become of the balloons, then the stillness was broken by a muffled sound, a subdued clatter, as if a heavy ruler had been dropped in one of the neighbouring studies.

"Can't be Prawle," mused Holme. "He's still at the pavilion, and I thought all the other fellows were outside."

He stepped into the passage. It being a hot day, the doors and windows of all the studies had been left open. But one door was shut, and that, oddly enough, of No. 5. Holme decided that it must have been from this room the faint sound had come, since he would have heard it more clearly through one of the open doors.

"Mallor and Grafton can't have come back yet," he said to himself. "They were going to have tea at the Grange."

Thinking that one of his friends might

have met with some mishap, and so been obliged to return earlier than the other members of the expedition, he crossed the passage, opened the door of No. 5, and entered the study. Instantly his eyes rounded with astonishment.

"Hallo, what brings you here, I'd like to know?" he growled.

Close to the window stood Carth, who appeared to have turned sharply round on hearing the door open. He stared at the newcomer for a moment without speaking, then he forced a grin, but a sudden flush of colour in his cheeks betrayed the real state of his feelings.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Holme.

"Oh, nothing particular," answered Carth.

He laughed, but the glare in his eyes showed quite clearly that inwardly he was consumed with mingled feelings of rage and mortification. Both his fists were clenched as if he were half inclined to use them in forcing his way out of the study. Holme, however, stood his ground, blocking the only way of escape. Though not a prefect, he was a member of the Sixth, a person entitled to respect, and one who could not be man-handled like some small boy in the Lower School.

"You've no right in here," he said sharply, then, catching sight of something which was lying on the floor, "What's that for?" he added.

The object at which he pointed was an ordinary ash-plant walking-stick, with a crook handle. It was pretty evident that the clatter, heard a few minutes ago, had been made by the stick falling on the ground.

"That's why I came," replied Carth glibly. "It's Mallor's stick, and I found

it lying about down in the basement. I thought I'd put it in his study before it got lost. I propped it up against the cupboard, but it slipped down while I was looking out of the window."

"How did you know it was Mallor's?"

"Why, I've seen him with it, and heard him say it was one he cut himself. Besides, it's got his initials carved just below the handle."

Holme knew that the stick was Mallor's, but not for a moment did he believe that it had just been brought from the basement. Still, the excuse was certainly ingenious, and it seemed difficult, if not impossible, to prove that it was a lie. Some one might have borrowed the stick, and not troubled to bring it back.

"That's all rot, and you needn't think I'm going to swallow it. My belief is that you've come to play some dirty trick on Grafton. You said you meant to get even with him for what happened down at the river the other day."

"My dear chap, I hadn't the faintest notion of doing anything of the kind," declared Carth vehemently. "That's nonsense, 'pon my word it is. I may have been a bit ratty down at the bathing-pool, and said I meant to get even with him, but I never meant to play him any tricks. I'll take my oath I didn't."

Almost against his will, Holme could not help feeling that, this time, the intruder was speaking the truth; moreover, there was no sign of any damage having been done, or even attempted. Not a single thing in the study was broken or out of place. As Holme glanced round the room his perplexity increased. Yet he was sure that there was mischief of some kind afoot, and that, if he accepted this paltry

excuse about the walking-stick, he would be allowing himself to be out-manceuvred. He determined to stick to his guns.

"You needn't think you're going to fool me, Carth. You've no right to be in this study, and I shan't let you go till you tell me what you're doing here."

"I have told you. I came because I found Mallor's walking-stick. There it is, as you can see for yourself."

"I don't believe you. If it was merely that stick, why should you have troubled to shut this door?"

Before the question could be answered there was a sound of footsteps in the passage. Prawle had lingered at the pavilion talking to his friend, and was now on his way to commence his humorous account of the balloon race. Hearing the "President's" voice, he halted, then entered the study.

"Look here, Holme, can you give me the date when this Aeronautic Club was started?" he asked, then seeing Carth: "Hallo," he added, "what's this chap been doing?"

"That's just what I want to know," replied Holme. "He's up to some game, and he won't tell me what it is."

"I've told him twice," protested Carth. "It's no use—"

"Wait a bit," interrupted Prawle. "You've got something in your hand; no—don't stick it in your pocket. Let's see what it is."

Carth hesitated and stood glaring at the two seniors like some wild animal brought to bay.

"Go on, put it on the table," ordered Prawle. "D'you hear what I say?"

"It's my own—you needn't think I've come here to steal anything," growled Carth. "There's no need to make a fuss."

As he spoke he stepped forward, and opened his hand; what fell jingling on the table was merely a short piece of steel chain with a bunch of keys at one end. Why its owner should have been anxious to conceal it seemed at first a mystery, then an idea flashed into Holme's mind. He snatched up the keys, and examined

"Oh, you needn't try any more bluff. Here's the key you used. The Head has got the broken piece that was found in the lock, and he'll be able to tell in a moment where it came from when he sees this key."

"You young hound, why were you trying to open that box?" demanded Prawle.

For a moment Carth's face continued to



"Clear out!" shouted Prawle.

them one by one; very soon a grunt of satisfaction told that he had found what he sought.

"One thing's clear enough," he said; "you're the fellow who tried to break open the post-box."

"What on earth makes you say that?" muttered Carth.

wear a look of surly defiance, then his expression began to change. The corners of his mouth turned down almost as if he were going to cry. He realised now that he was cornered, and seemed to think that his only chance of escape lay in full confession.

"I'll tell you everything," he began in a cringing tone. "There's really no need

for you to make a fuss about it, and get into a row. It was Berger's fault as much as mine; he suggested it, and he was with me when we tried to open the box. As a matter of fact we never did open it—the beastly key broke in the lock.”

“And what business had either of you to meddle with the post-box?”

“Why, it was like this,” replied Carth with a feeble grin, as if he hoped that his story might be regarded as funny rather than shameful, “soon after dinner that day we saw the Head stick a whole bundle of letters in the box. We knew what they were—half-term reports which he'd just been signing. Berger and I felt jolly sure that our reports were pretty bad 'uns, and that the remarks wouldn't be at all complimentary. It only means getting a wrathful letter from your guv'nor, wanting to know this, that, and the other. Well, as I was saying, we saw the Head stick all the School-house reports into the post-box, and Berger suggested getting them out—his and mine, and tearing them up. It's very doubtful if his or my people would have troubled about them. If we had been able to destroy those two reports, and if my folks or Berger's had noticed not having received them, it would have been supposed the blessed things had been lost in the post.”

“You're a nice pair, I must say,” growled Prawle. “I should have thought a bit more of you if you'd not been so ready to give your pal away. But what's all this got to do with your being in this study?”

“I came to get those keys.”

“Rubbish!” exclaimed Holme. “I suppose, now, you're going to try to drag in Grafton and Mallor—make out that they've been hiding your keys, eh?”

“No, I wasn't. Let me finish, and then you'll understand. When we found we couldn't open the box we strolled out into the yard. I can't think why I was such a fool, but I'll tell you what I did. We were walking along just under this wall, and we heard two sparrows fighting in the ivy; I had the keys and chain bunched up in my hand, and, without thinking, I chucked them up to scare the birds. The chain got caught in the ivy, and there it's been ever since.”

“And after what the Head said that evening at tea you've been in a mortal funk lest your keys should be found,” sneered Prawle. “I see there's a bone tab on the bunch with your name, which shows whose they are. I wonder you didn't have the sense to take the broken key off the bunch, and chuck it away.”

“It didn't strike me that there was a piece of it left in the lock—not till after the Head came into the dining-hall, and kicked up such a fuss,” admitted Carth. “We knew the keys were hung up just under this window; I tried to get them down by chucking stones, but it wasn't any good.”

“So you came to fish for them with that stick?”

“When I leant out of the window I found I could reach them without the stick, so I let it drop on the floor. I hadn't the least intention to harm anything in the study. The idea that I should come here to smash up Grafton's things while he was away is madness. I shouldn't be such an idiot.”

“Is that all?” asked Holme.

“Yes, that's all.”

“No, it isn't. You haven't told us yet that you are the fellow who came into

this study in the middle of the night. It was you, right enough. You may as well own up, and not give us any more of your lies."

"I came in the night because I thought there'd be no one about."

"Why on earth were you such an ass as to light the gas?" demanded Prawle.

"I knew Mallor had a stick with a hook at the end, and I thought I should want it. I searched about but couldn't find the beastly thing, so I lit the gas. A moment later I heard footsteps out in the yard, so I turned out the light, and bolted."

"You blackguard!" cried Holme. "You must have known that the Head believed it was Grafton, and sent for him next morning. You didn't care what happened to other people so long as you yourself escaped."

There was a pause. Carth stood biting his lip, his sole concern being to "save his bacon."

"Look here," he began in a wheedling tone, "I don't see I've done any one any harm. We never meant to take anything out of the post-box except those two reports, and you can see for yourselves I haven't touched a thing in this study, except Mallor's stick. You'll gain nothing by getting me into a bother, so you might be a couple of sportsmen and say nothing more about it."

"Sportsmen!" scoffed Holme. "And your idea of a sportsman is to allow the Head to think that Grafton's a liar."

Prawle nodded, and, with a grim smile, dropped the chain and keys into his pocket.

"I've a good mind to boot you down the passage," he growled. "If you think you're going to get these keys back you're jolly well mistaken. I shall give them to Talbot as soon as he comes in from cricket,

and it's probable he'll want to have a word with you after tea. Now clear out."

"Oh, but there's no reason——" began Carth.

"CLEAR OUT!" shouted Prawle.

For an instant the culprit hesitated, then, as the prefect began to move towards him, he gave a yelp, and shot out of the room.

CHAPTER VII

"HIS MARK"

JUNIOR members of Claverhill College were accustomed to regard the Head Master's study as a room in which one could breathe freely only on the first evening or last morning of the term. Wherefore, had one of the small boys been privileged to behold the gathering assembled in Mr. Whitcomb's sanctum a few hours after the return of the Natural History Society from Hedwith Grange, he might have fancied he was dreaming.

Several things would have been noted as giving to the place a strange and unusual appearance. That the meeting was an informal one was proved by the fact that Mrs. Whitcomb was present, seated on the end of a couch. Her husband was smoking a big cherry-wood pipe, while Talbot leant back in an arm-chair, with a broad grin on his face as he surveyed the extraordinary figure standing in the middle of the room. It was at Grafton he gazed: a man who, though not good enough for the House Eleven, was now wearing a blazer, on the breast pocket of which were emblazoned the crest of a cricket club, the name of which is famous throughout the civilised world.

"I should have been back sooner, sir," he was saying, "but Lady Carlace insisted on my staying to have dinner with them at the Grange."

"I wonder she didn't keep you there all night," laughed Mrs. Whitcomb. "I don't think I should ever have wanted to let you go."

"Has Sir Edwin given you that coat for keeps?" inquired Talbot.

"It isn't his to give; it belongs to his brother," chuckled Grafton. "He's going to send my things over to-morrow when they are dry."

"It's to be hoped he'll come himself, and ask Mr. Whitcomb to give us all a half-holiday," said the senior prefect.

"Don't you count on that, Talbot," laughed the Head. "If he comes at all it may be to demand the blood of the members of the Aeronautic Club, since it was one of their balloons which caused the child to fall out of the boat."

"Oh, he doesn't feel like that, sir," said Grafton. "He was rather amused when I told him about the club, and he knows it was no one's fault the wind carrying the balloon to Hedwith."

"And what did he say to you?" inquired Mrs. Whitcomb. "I mean when you and this deaf gentleman brought the little girl back from the lake?"

"Mr. Robert was in a fearful state about what he called his own carelessness, but Sir Edwin said: 'My dear chap, don't be a fool!'—he told him he could quite understand how it happened."

"But what did he say to *you*?" persisted the lady.

For a moment Grafton made no reply, but stood fingering one of the brass buttons of his amazing blazer.

"Oh—er, I don't know," he murmured. "He said it was a good thing I was a fast swimmer."

The smile faded from Mrs. Whitcomb's face.

"Yes, thank God for that," she said softly. "If you hadn't been so quick—if you hadn't been such a first-rate swimmer, it's terrible to think—that poor child—"

The sentence became broken, and ended abruptly with a catch in the speaker's voice which sounded almost like a sob. There followed a silence broken at length by the Head, who had been puffing away at his pipe, lost in meditation.

"What are you smiling at?" he asked, with a twinkle in his own eyes.

"Nothing, sir," answered Grafton.

"Oh, come, you're laughing at something, and you might as well let us share the joke."

The kindly tone in which the words were spoken encouraged Grafton to be more communicative. "He lost all feelings of restraint, and might now have been conversing with Holme and Mallor over a brew of supper cocoa in No. 5 study."

"Sir Edwin was asking how long it took me to get from the bank of the lake to the island; I couldn't tell him, but I must have been pretty quick. He said no doubt I was in good training from daily practice in the college swimming baths, and what an advantage it was to have such a thing so that boys could learn to be good swimmers when they were young. He went on talking for quite a bit about our swimming bath, then asked what was its length, and I told him we hadn't got one."

Some memory, it may have been of the baronet's face when this unexpected answer



W. S. Grafton

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Grafton's reply was not in words. •

had been given, caused Grafton to shake with suppressed laughter.

"Of course," he went on, "I told him, sir, that you'd done all you could to get us one, but that the governors couldn't see their way because of the expense."

"Did you tell him about 'Water Polo'?" asked Talbot.

"I told him about the pool."

"Grafton, my dear boy, you deserve a medal," interrupted Mrs. Whitcomb. "I should think Sir Edwin would give you one."

Grafton grinned, and shook his head.

"I hope he'll give us something better than a medal," he murmured.

"Us!" echoed Talbot. "What d'you mean by that?"

"It was something Lady Carlace said while we were at dinner. Of course I can't be certain if he'll do it, but I rather think he will."

"Do what?" asked the Head.

"Lady Carlace looked across the table, sir, and she said: 'I'll tell you what it is, Edwin, you ought to give those boys a proper swimming bath.'"

A shower of sparks descended from Mr. Whitcomb's pipe as it nearly fell out of his hand.

"Never!" he cried.

"My dear, there's no need to celebrate the occasion by setting the carpet in a blaze," expostulated Mrs. Whitcomb. "If we are to have a bonfire in Grafton's honour, the boys must make it in the playing field."

"If we do have a bonfire," chuckled Talbot, "then Carth shall be the 'Guy.'"

Three "old boys" who had journeyed to Claverhill to watch the "Past v. Present" match, left the playing-field and sauntered towards a low, glass-roofed building which

had been erected since the days when they themselves had answered their names at "roll-call."

"How many years is it since you made that memorable expedition to Hedwith Grange?" inquired Holme.

"Don't ask," replied Mallor. "Suppose you've noticed I'm wearing specs?"

"That's because you spend such a lot of time staring into a microscope," said Grafton. "Oh, I know, old son; when there's anything about you in the papers I say to people: 'I was at school with that man.'"

"What I tell people is that I first started him on his distinguished career as a naturalist by making his camera-gun," declared Holme.

They reached the building towards which their steps had been directed, and, coming to a halt, stood for a time surveying it in silence.

"Better than the old pool," remarked Holme. "Have you been inside?"

Grafton nodded.

"There's a tablet fixed up on the wall behind the diving-board," began Mallor. "So far as I remember, it says: 'This swimming bath was presented to Claverhill College by Sir Edwin Carlace in grateful acknowledgment of his only child having been saved from drowning by a member of the school—A. J. Grafton.'"

"A. J. Grafton—his mark," chuckled Holme, with an inclination of his head towards the bath.

"D'you know," continued the kind-hearted Mallor, "when I read that inscription, somehow I felt almost inclined to weep."

"Get away," laughed Grafton. "I felt jolly well inclined to jump in and have a swim."

Lawn Tennis and How to Play It

By C. BERNARD RUTLEY

MORE than in any other game, there is an opening in the front ranks of lawn tennis players for the young British champion. Most of our great players are men nearing or past middle age; for whereas in other countries boys learn the science of the game during their school-days, in Great Britain it is usually only after they leave school that they take up lawn tennis. For this reason Great Britain has not won the World's Championship since 1909, and she is not likely to regain her lost position until some "youthful prodigy" appears, capable of beating the super players of other nations.

Much is written, nowadays, about the way the racket should be gripped. The orthodox grip, used by the majority of players, consists of gripping the racket near the end of the handle so that the back of the hand is parallel with the back of the racket, the thumb coming round the top of the handle, with the fingers underneath, the weight being chiefly supported by the first finger with the joint pointing to the ground. For a backhand stroke this grip is simply shifted round so that the palm of the hand is on top of the handle and parallel with the ground, the

fingers being in front, whilst the weight of the racket is supported underneath by the thumb.

These grips are often modified to suit the comfort or style of the player. For the backhand shot many players allow the thumb to lie up the back of the handle, instead of underneath, believing that thereby they gain additional support for the stroke, whilst, if your wrist is strong enough, you will gain added power for your forehand shots by holding the leather button of the racket in the hand. Whatever grip you use, however, let it be comfortable. Avoid a grip high up the handle. Such a grip cramps your action, takes power from your strokes, and renders a good drive almost impossible.

Lawn tennis strokes are divided into two classes—ground strokes, and volleys. Here be it said that the golden rule for all beginners is, "Go slowly." Do not start by trying to put weird and wonderful screws on your returns; you will never become a good player that way. Even if you eventually develop a cut shot which earns the hatred of all who are unused to it, it will be your only shot, and the good player must have a whole battery of strokes at his command.

Start by developing a good forehand drive. The forehand drive is the foundation of lawn tennis, and is a magnificent weapon, both of offence and defence. In making a forehand drive, stand with your left shoulder towards the net—I am presuming that you are a right-handed player. If you are left-handed, reverse the positions—feet well apart, and with your weight supported by your right foot. Swing back the arm and racket from the shoulder in one straight line, then forward again, striking the ball at the top of the bounce, and following right through with the arm and racket. Body and all should be put into the drive, so that when the “follow through” has been completed your weight will have been transferred from your right to your left foot.

A useful shot against an opponent who glories in base-line play is the “chop.” It is a cut shot, the ball being undercut so that it travels slowly, and breaks disconcertingly to the right on touching the ground. It is a difficult shot off which to make a telling reply, unless your opponent happens to be a volleyer, in which case he will make short work of your return, for the “chop” travels high in the air.

Whatever stroke you are playing, however, *keep your eye on the ball*. Do not worry about the height of the net, the length of the court, or what your opponent is doing—such knowledge will come instinctively—but from the beginning to the end of the stroke, keep your eyes glued on the ball. If you watch your opponent, or look where you are going to hit the ball, your strokes immediately become a matter of chance, and you will muff as many as you make.

In developing your ground strokes, remember that the essence of modern play is to *attack*, and in attacking *speed* is the first essential. Get your return under way as soon as possible, for by so doing you give your opponent less time to get into position. Take the ball on the top of the bounce, sooner, if you can—every moment saved is a moment gained—and when you have learned to make your shots standing still, learn to make them on the run. Thus you will save still more time, for, instead of having to start after you have made your shot, you will already be on the way to the fresh position you wish to take up. Do not be content with a single shot, however good it may be. Develop them all! Watch how they are done by a good player, and copy his actions. Actual demonstration is worth pages of written instructions.

We now come to the stroke which ninety-nine players out of a hundred approach with fear and trembling—the backhand shot. The reason why so many players are weak on their backhand is, “funkt,” pure and simple “funkt.” Instead of going boldly for the backhand stroke they run round the ball on every possible occasion, and return it forehand. Their backhand accordingly never gets any practice, and being the player’s weakest spot will be unmercifully played to by his opponents, in every match and tournament in which he may take part.

To play a backhand drive have your right shoulder towards the net, and the feet well apart. Swing the racket back past your left shoulder, and then bring it forward with a clean, free sweep on to the ball, keeping the racket face at right angles

to the ground, and following through as with the forehand drive.

To perfect your ground shots you must practise them constantly, and beware of being lured into neglecting them by a preference for the volleying game, for the player who can only volley is helpless against the man who can play ground shot or volley with equal ease. A brick wall is the best medium to practise on, but if one is not available, practise your strokes one after another in friendly sets. In one play the straight forehand drive, in another concentrate on "chop" shots, whilst in a third take all the balls you can on the backhand. Remember that the nearer you are to the net the less power can you safely put into your ground shots, because you have less length of court to play over.

The lob is a stroke too little practised by the majority of players; yet it is a very useful stroke on occasions, besides being one of the most irritating to an opponent.

To lob successfully requires a large amount of skill and accuracy. If the lob is too low it will be killed by your opponent at the net, if too far, it will go out. Properly played a lob should drop within a foot or so of the base-line, and so long as this can be accomplished the higher it is sent into the air the better. In returning a lob always endeavour to return it on the volley before it touches the ground. By so doing you give your opponent less time to regain position, and to gain time to extricate himself from a dangerous position is often a player's chief object in lobbing. If the ball pitches, however, it is usually safest to return it by another lob, as by that time your opponent will have got into position to kill a low return.

To become really successful at lawn tennis a good service is necessary, and the two essentials of a good service are *speed* and *good direction*. Naturally, as far as speed is concerned, the advantage is with the tall man, for his height allows him to hit the ball down into his opponent's court. But, as the object of a good service is to place the ball in such a position in the opponent's court as will make it most difficult for him to play a good return, "good direction" is as essential as speed, and here the short man is equal with his taller companion.

Pitch your service as near your opponent's service line as possible. The short-pitched service favours the striker-out, for to take it he must come up close to the net, and is at once in a position to volley your return; whereas a good service, far back on the service line, will allow the server to take up a volleying position before the return comes across, and will perhaps enable him to catch his opponent out of position half way between the back line and the net.

A varied service is more disconcerting to an opponent than one which always pitches in the same spot. He knows where the latter is coming each time, and can take position accordingly, but the former keeps him in a state of uncertainty. Serve to your opponent's weakness, which will probably be his backhand. If you are serving from the left-hand court this will drive him out on to the side lines in the endeavour to take your serve forehand. If, having got him there, you suddenly send a ball down the middle of the court, a few inches inside the centre line, you will probably win the point right out. The next time he will take up a more central

position, and a good ball on his backhand will probably evoke a weak return.

Be content to perfect a plain service before starting any complicated variations. Stand outside the base-line, with your weight on your right foot—if one foot touches the line, or goes over it before the ball has been delivered, it is a “foot-fault,” and the point goes to your opponent. Throw the ball into the air with the left hand, swing the racket back over your right shoulder, then bring it up, hitting the ball at the very top of your reach, and following through with the racket, arm, and body, the weight of which will have been transferred to the left foot.

There are, of course, dozens of variations of service, so cultivate the one which comes most easily to you, and does not tire you unduly. If you hit the ball with a flat racket you will get a straight, smashing serve, whilst if you cut the ball from left to right at the same time as hitting it forward, you will impart a spin which will cause the ball to break away to the striker-out's right. Whatever sort of service you adopt, however, if you possess the necessary height, *hit hard*.

Volleying is the game of the day, and to get into position between the service line and the net, where you can volley your opponent's return, is the best form of attack. A volley is a wrist and forearm shot, requiring little swing back, and allowing no time for a follow through, if you are to be ready for the next shot. For its effect a volley depends almost entirely on the placing of the ball. You must *go for* the ball—never give ground if you can possibly help it—place your shot hard in the spot most awkward for your opponent, and whence he will find

it most difficult to make a good reply, and then, having got high on the run, and out of position, play a winner off his return.

The smash is the most aggressive of all volleys. It is the outright winner, chiefly from its pace, which should make it almost impossible to return. It is executed in the same way as the service, the ball being hit *down* into the opponent's court from as high in the air as the player can reach.

When you have got a hard-hitting opponent on the back line, and you are up at the net, a “stop” volley will usually score a winner. For this stroke you must be near the net, and must hold your racket upright, and with the face flat towards the approaching ball. You do not hit the ball—the pace already on it being sufficient—but at the moment of impact the racket is drawn sharply up or down the ball. The spin thus imparted to the ball will cause the return to drop dead just on the other side of the net.

Whenever possible, volley *down*, not up. Offensive volleying requires you to be as near the net as possible. A foot or two farther back, and the ball will have dropped so that your return becomes an up volley, which is practically a defensive shot. Never let an opponent at the net catch you on neutral ground just behind the service line. You are at his mercy there, for he can slam the ball hard at your feet, if he does not pass you altogether.

Good tactics are, of course, as important as good strokes, and a good tactician will almost always beat a good stroke player without tactics. Try to make your opponent do most of the work by keeping him on the run. Learn to anticipate your opponent's return, to place your shots, and to work for an opening, for therein

lies the secret of successful tactics. Do not try to slog every return into a winner. Look ahead, work your opponent out of position, and having got him on the run, place your next return in the opposite corner where he cannot get it.

Do not try to drive "through" a baseliner who possesses good ground strokes. By so doing you are simply playing into his hands. Having got him on the back-line, play a short "chop" shot, and make him forsake his stronghold.

Mix your strokes—first a long shot, then a short one, and so on—so that your opponent is never certain what you are going to do next. Never follow a weak shot up to the net, as thereby you are courting disaster. When, however, you have sent across a powerful shot which will catch your opponent in an awkward position from which he can only make a weak return, then run in and kill the ball.

Make it your first thought on starting a match to discover your opponent's weakness, and then hammer at it without mercy. You will soon find out the strokes he thrives on, and having done so leave them alone.

There is a great difference between singles and doubles play. The former is the better practice for a beginner. It teaches him self-reliance, to play an all-round game, and to be a good singles player it is absolutely necessary to be a good all-round player. In singles it is the man who gets to the net first, and kills his opponent's weak return that wins. Study your opponent, and if you find that the game you are playing is losing you the match, change it, and try another style. Above all, never be compelled to play a wholly defensive game, such tactics hardly ever win.

In doubles there is your partner to consider, and the question of combination comes in. In the first place, practise constantly with your partner, and get to know each other's play so thoroughly that you play as one man.

The modern doubles formation is both players at the net. After you have served, get to the net as quickly as possible, and the same applies to the striker-out after he has returned the service.

Mix your returns. Do not always return your opponent's service in the same way, or the man at the net will soon learn where it is coming, and kill it every time. The shot down the centre of the court between your opponents will often prove a winner, as will the return hard at the server's feet as he runs in.

Once at the net you and your partner must work in unison, or your opponents will soon discover holes in your defence. If your partner is driven left, move left also, and always keep the same distance from him. If your partner is driven to the back of the court to retrieve a lob, then you must retreat also, for your position alone at the net is untenable.

Never poach! If it is doubtful as to which partner a ball belongs it should either be returned by the player who made the previous stroke, or by the player who can return it with a forehand shot, according to previous arrangement between the partners.

Finally, to be a good tennis player you must be a fighter. Never lose heart when the game is going against you, and never slack off when you have got a good lead. Disaster lies that way. Play a clean game, but play to win all the time. That is the way to get the best out of lawn tennis.

A PRICELESS FAG



HERBERT HAYENS

CHAPTER I

WILLIAM HENRY

DIFFERENT boys took different views of William Henry Pegson, the latest addition to the Fourth Form at Redlands College, but on one point the opinion was unanimous—he was far too clean. Cleanliness, they admitted, was a great virtue—Harvey added that in the Fourth it was also a rarity—but like everything else could be carried to excess.

William Henry's first appearance created a mild sensation. Thompson, whose people were in the army, declared he might have been a cavalry officer, specially groomed for a royal review. From his cap to the toes of his boots not a speck could be seen on him anywhere. His hands were white, his nails carefully manicured; his hair was nicely brushed, and, crowning indignity, neatly parted in the middle. He wore a

snowy collar, and his tie might have been put on by an artist. What could one make of a chap who possessed such peculiar tastes? Dawson, who always rose at the very last second and had therefore no time for more than the most perfunctory ablutions, declared in disgust that he was "a good little boy out of a Sunday School book," and since Dawson was what our American friends call a "big noise" in the Fourth, this piece of wit was duly applauded.

But William Henry not only showed no embarrassment at his mixed reception, but actually seemed to glory in his offence. He took a keen delight in washing—absolutely wallowed in the water, Dawson put it—brushed his clothes, discarded a collar if only slightly soiled, and day after day appeared at breakfast—to quote Thompson again—as if on parade. Viewed from the proper angle, this ridiculous neatness was really an insult to the Fourth.

Not that the young gentleman gave himself airs or assumed any superiority. To the general surprise, indeed, he chummed in almost from the first with Roddy Marchant, and no one had ever accused Roddy of being too spruce. He was a freckled-faced youngster with dancing eyes and laughing mouth, and a general air of careless, happy-go-lucky joyousness. He was a frequent visitor to the detention room, but four walls never made a prison for Roddy, and he chuckled over his "lines" as if punishment were the greatest joke in the world. He had usually three or four buttons missing from his various garments, and not infrequently an odd piece of twine assisted his braces to carry out their proper function.

Roddy was also by way of being a naturalist, and had several unpleasant pets, which he kept hidden in various safe places to be brought out for airing at convenient seasons. His collection included a ferret and a blind adder, of both of which he was extremely fond; but the special object of his devotion was Rattler, a huge rat, perfectly tame, though rather disconcerting to persons not partial to those estimable rodents.

"The fellows don't like Rattler," he explained to his new chum; "make no end of a fuss when I let him out, and he can do lots of tricks, too. Stand on his hind legs and beg for biscuits and things like that. There was a jolly row in our dorm. one night," and he laughed joyously.

"Through Rattler?"

"Yes. Hadn't a chance to take him back to his den, so I carried him upstairs in my pocket. The fellows didn't know he was there, and I reckon Rattler went for a midnight ramble and got lost. Anyhow

he seems to have paid every chap a visit, sat on his face and licked him, friendly as possible, you know, and all that. But the chumps kicked up an awful hullabalo: got out of bed and screamed and shouted till Bedale came in. He couldn't make head or tail of their yarns except that there were about twenty rats in the room, and the mugs were afraid of being eaten alive. Bedale reported, and the Head had plumbers and gasfitters and carpenters working all over the place trying to find their holes. Lord, Peggy, you'd have choked to death laughing!"

"But didn't they catch on to Rattler?"

"No; 'twas in his early days, and he hadn't given a public exhibition before. But it was a perfect scream!"

"Must have been! couldn't have another performance, eh? Not in the dorm., of course."

Roddy shook his head. "All the Fourth know him now," he said, "but we might plant him on some of the other fellows. We'll have a shot some day. Come and peep at him," and the oddly assorted pair strolled off.

That same evening William Henry was writing a letter home, though the common-room was not the most favourable place in the world for literary composition. There was a good deal of noise, and Dawson thought he saw a fine opportunity for a practical joke. He whispered to Hibbert, who grinned, and picking up an inkwell walked quietly along to where the new boy was sitting. Dawson followed, and at the proper moment jostled his chum, jerking the inkwell and splashing the clean collar with the inky fluid. Several boys laughed loudly, but a few gave a murmur of sympathy. It was a rotten trick anyhow.

William Henry made no fuss. He got up, turned towards Dawson and asked quietly, "Was that an accident, or did you do it on purpose?"

All the laughter stopped on a sudden. Precisely why, the boys themselves could not have told, but a deep hush took the place of the previous noise. Even Dawson felt a trifle uneasy, but he could not back out, with every one looking on.

"Have it which way you like," he laughed softly, and the next instant Dawson, feeling as if an earthquake had struck him, lay sprawling on his back.

He rose to his feet, swung his arms about, and with a howl of rage rushed at Pegson, but a nasty jolt under the ribs, followed by a hefty blow on the chin, sent him down again.

"You can have as much more as you like," said William Henry sweetly, "but I'd advise you to be satisfied. And now I'll trouble you for the sum of one shilling, price of a new collar. You can have this one in the morning."

The crowd stood stock still. This was an entirely new game, and on the whole they rather enjoyed it. Dawson lay staring at the ceiling, and when Hibbert tried to interfere, Roddy pushed him away.

"You keep your finger out of the pie," he said; "Dawson's big enough and ugly enough to look after himself," and it was plain from the murmur of approval that he had the majority with him.

"Now," continued William Henry, "get up or pay up; but if you get up, I'll knock you down again."

The unhappy Dawson scowled and glared and muttered threats of vengeance, but at the same time made no attempt to move.

"Shell out," cried Roddy, with a happy grin.

"You'll get the same dose to-morrow, and the next, and the next, till you do," William Henry remarked.

"Better pay, Dawson," advised Moorhouse. "'Twas a shabby trick, and a decent fellow reckons to pay for his sport anyhow."

"Give the Jew his money," said Hibbert scornfully. "What a fuss over a bit of a joke."

Dawson, still muttering, finally produced the money, and William Henry put it in his pocket. "Now we're quits," said he, "or at least we shall be in the morning," and there was a deep chuckle from the Fourth Form boys when Dawson at breakfast found a small parcel, very neatly done up, by the side of his plate.

From that day William Henry stood on a different footing with his fellows. It was obvious that in a fair stand-up fight Dawson had not the slightest chance, and hitherto he had been Cock of the Form.

"Didn't know you were so handy with your fists, Pegson," said Moorhouse.

"Learned to box at home," was the reply; "two big brothers, and they're both fairly useful with the gloves."

"Well, you've squashed Dawson, he'll fight shy of any more hanky-panky with you. But he ain't such a bad sort of chap really. The truth is, we were all a bit afraid of him, and he needed a lesson; do him no end of good."

"Oh, that's all right, I don't bear him any ill-will; still, he ought to learn how to use his hands. Hasn't an earthly notion: a preparatory school kid could lick him easily."

"You ought to be able to settle some

fellows in Upper," said Roddy admiringly ; "there are two or three who would be none the worse for a dusting."

William Henry laughed. "To hear you talk any one would think I intended to set up as a prize fighter ! I rather enjoy a friendly round or two with the gloves, but I don't care for fighting." •

Greatly to the surprise of the Form, Dawson made no effort to carry on the quarrel. He sulked for several days, and talked rather big to his intimate cronies ; but, with the exception of Hibbert, they showed little enthusiasm, and indeed, more than one hinted pretty broadly that he deserved all he had received.

"Anyhow," said Perry, "he's got you licked every time, old man ; knows the game all ends up."

"And not a bit cocky about it either," added Peterson.

That was just where the new boy scored. He never boasted or put on side, and was always ready to laugh at a joke even at his own expense. The smaller fry secretly regarded him as a sort of hero, and without any trying on his part he became very popular.

Things were going smoothly again in the Fourth when Packer of the Sixth dropped his bombshell. It had always been a vexed question at Redlands whether the seniors had a right to take a fag from the Fourth Form. Many battles had been waged over the point, and the juniors had resisted so stoutly that the Sixth, though maintaining their principle, had refrained from putting it in force. Now Packer, suddenly and without warning, had demanded that the Fourth should provide him with a fag. •

Instantly the juniors were up in arms.

Private feuds were buried or forgotten, and the peaceful community was turned into a band of rebels. And that it was Packer who had dug up the hatchet added fuel to the flames. Had it been Brownlow, or Seymour, or Harding, or any decent chap matters might not have been so bad—but Packer !

"Who is the gentleman when he's at home ?" inquired William Henry of his chum.

"The biggest hooligan in Redlands, my son, bar none. Thinks himself a twentieth century Napoleon. What he says is right, what you say is wrong. A hefty chap and as strong as a bull. When I open my mouth let no dog bark. You serve him on bended knee and kiss his slippers reverently. If he says the moon is made of green cheese you hasten to agree, and thank him for his words of wisdom."

"Pleasant sort of chap."

"Remarkably so !"

"But why don't the other seniors put him in a bag ?"

"Afraid of him, my son, ab-so-lutely afraid of him."

"And one of us is going to fag for him ?"

"Not on your life, Peggy. We're frightened to death, but we're going to keep our flag flying. The Fourth won't fag. That's the law of the Medes and Persians, which never changes. I believe," solemnly, "that the smallest chap in the form would commit murder first."

"Some one ought to sacrifice himself for the good of the others," quietly.

"Meaning fag for Packer ?" in disgust.

"It seems the only way."

Roddy flung his arms wide in despair. "You don't understand," he cried ; "it can't be done. Why, if a fellow offered

he'd be torn to pieces. We're holding a meeting this evening to swear that we'll never submit."

"Sorry I can't agree with you, Roddy, but I'm all for peace and harmony, and if no one else will fag for Packer I will."

Roddy gazed at his chum in undisguised

tyrants, and called on his audience to "nail their colours to the mast," electrified the company by the calm announcement that for the sake of peace and quietness he intended to fag for the autocrat.

His statement was received with scorn, amazement, and contempt. Angry cries



He was so flustered that he upset the steaming beverage over the senior's legs.

wonder. "You're joking, Peggy, say you're joking," he cried. "It will be simply awful. You'll be sent to Coventry, old son; every fellow will give you the cold shoulder."

But William Henry declined to yield. He attended the meeting, and after Moorhouse had made a tremendously blood-thirsty speech, in which he denounced all

broke out; names like "blackleg," "cad," "traitor," "coward," were hurled at him, and it almost seemed as if Roddy were right and that he would be lynched there and then.

Little Monson—Shrimp, the smallest and youngest boy in the form—got on to the table and seamed excitedly. Packer might cane him, twist his arms, break his

ribs, and he wouldn't fag for him! no decent fellow would. Pegson was a white-livered coward bringing disgrace on the form, and he had no right to associate with decent fellows. Shrimp's outburst was greeted with wild applause, and the meeting was fast getting out of order when Mr. Drage's voice was heard in the corridor sternly ordering them to stop their noise.

"Lucky he didn't come in," Roddy remarked later, to which his chum made the strange and unintelligible reply that he couldn't come in because he wasn't there.

Meanwhile the Fourth had coaxed and threatened, sneered, wheedled, argued all in vain; William Henry was not to be moved. Moorhouse almost wept, Dawson would never have believed Pegson was such a weak-kneed chap, while Roddy Marchant hung his head for very shame. That Peggy should knuckle down at the first crack of the whip was humiliating.

CHAPTER II

THE DOWNFALL OF NAPOLEON

WHEN the "martyr," as he called himself, set out, amidst jeers and hoots and taunts, to begin his new duties, Roddy Marchant had shouted "traitor" and "blackleg"; but he had evidently got over his sense of shame, and it was in quite cheerful tones that he hoped Packer would "knock the stuffing" out of him. The martyr replied with a grin and went his way.

Packer had Hawkesbury in his study when the new boy made his appearance.

He seemed a very nice boy, clean and neat, and filled with the spirit of meekness.

"If you please, Mr. Packer," he began. Hawkesbury roared.

"Don't call me Mr. Packer," said his new master.

"No, sir," humbly. Hawkesbury dug his fingers between his ribs.

"Oh, hang it, just call me Packer."

"Yes, sir. Yes, Packer. If you please, I'm Pegson of the Fourth, and I'm come to fag for you."

"Oh, they've eaved in, have they? I told you they would," to Hawkesbury. "You've only to stand firm and they'll come to heel right enough. Pegson, we're going out, and you can make a start by tidying up the room: it needs it."

"Yes, sir. Yes, Mr. Packer." The boy was obviously nervous before such an important person.

"Nice little chap," observed Packer, as the seniors walked away, "and well-mannered too."

"Yes, sir—I mean Mr. Packer," and Hawkesbury exploded again.

He retailed the joke in the senior room, and it created such amusement that Packer became first embarrassed and then angry; it seemed as if his new fag's humility might prove a bit awkward.

The sight of his study, however, when he returned, restored his good humour. Pegson had done his work wonderfully well; all the litter had been removed, the books dusted and nicely rearranged: the only fly in the amber, so to speak, was that his best picture lay on the table with the glass smashed and the gilded frame badly battered. But the fag had left a pathetic little note describing how the cord had broken in his hand, and how fearfully

sorry he was. He hoped that Packer would forgive him, but he had never fagged for any one before, and he was awkward.

The great man's heart was touched. "Poor little beggar," he said, "nervous as a cat! I'll have to tell him he needn't be afraid of me."

Only Roddy Marchant in the Lower School heard the story that night, and he went black in the face with unholy joy. "Did the mug swallow it, Peggy?" he asked anxiously; "did he really swallow it?"

"Mr. Packer swelled visibly, my son, and would have swelled some more if Hawkesbury hadn't been there."

"Oh, Peggy, could you get me a job? Couldn't you blarney him into believing that such a great man ought to have two fags?"

William Henry shook his head. "He'd believe it all right, but it wouldn't work; you couldn't play the game. You have to be humble and lowly, and order yourself reverently before your betters. It needs tact, my son, and you haven't any."

"Did the picture get a real good dunt?"

"Several," with a great chuckle, "I saw to that," and Roddy rocked again in ecstasy.

The new fag was certainly a treasure, though perhaps he stood a little too much in awe of his master. That same evening, for example, when Packer spoke a little sharply, bidding him hurry with the teapot, he was so flustered that he upset the steaming beverage over the senior's legs, who danced with pain, and made a hurried exit from the room.

Various little accidents occurred during his first week's service. Hawkesbury frightened him so that he let an armful of

crockery fall to the floor, and spent a considerable time in picking up the pieces. Packer cuffed his ears and called him a silly little idiot, but he looked so miserable and was so full of tearful apologies that Hawkesbury interfered.

"Buck up, young 'un," he exclaimed, "and don't worry so much. Packer won't eat you. Take things steady; you're doing jolly well for a beginner." But then, as Packer reflected, the broken crockery wasn't Hawkesbury's.

"I'm so nervous," the fag confessed, "and I do want to please Mr. Packer."

"Well, don't be so jumpy and you'll get on all right."

"Oh, thank you," replied the fag gratefully, "I'm sure I try my best."

"The little beggar has his points," Packer admitted, when William Henry had retired to regale the waiting Roddy with the story of his adventures, "but he's getting expensive. It's astonishing what buttery fingers he has! I hardly dare look at him when he's carrying anything."

"Pure funk," replied Hawkesbury, "he's in holy terror of you, that's what's the matter," which, curiously enough, gave Packer quite a thrill of satisfaction.

Most of the form were still bitterly angry with William Henry for his cowardly surrender, but they listened eagerly to Roddy's stories of his doings as a fag. They roared with delight over "Mr. Packer," and the scalding tea, and the broken china, but a few of them wondered how William Henry had so suddenly become nervous and jumpy.

"It's news to me that he has any nerves," Moorhouse remarked.

"It's Packer," exclaimed Roddy with a laugh; "he crumples Peggy right up."

"Well," said Dawson, "the chap's deceived me altogether; I thought he had pluck enough to face anything or anybody. And to knuckle under to Packer!"

Moorhouse waited until he got Roddy alone, when he said suspiciously, "Look here, Roddy, is this a stunt, or what? You won't make me believe that chap's as funky as all that."

"Between you and me, old man, it is a bit surprising. But you don't think he would have the cheek to fool Packer, do you?"

"I'm not so sure," muttered Moorhouse, "it looks to me uncommonly like a rag. But if it is, and Packer twigs it——!"

"Oh, well!" replied the other coolly, "it's Peggy's funeral, not ours."

A day or two later William Henry appeared, looking particularly pleased.

"The great man's giving a spread, and I'm to find a chap to help me get things ready. If you were a bit steadier, now——"

Roddy leaped at him, his eyes sparkling. "When is it, Peggy?" he demanded eagerly—"to-night?"

"Yes, it's Napoleon's birthday, and he's doing the thing in style. Borrowing Brownlow's table, and laying in all sorts of things. Do the seniors know anything about Rattler?"

Roddy danced. "Not a word, not a syllable. Oh, my stars, what a lark! Peggy, you're a genius!"

"It struck me that if, by accident, you know, Rattler happened to be in your pocket, and if, at the proper moment he happened to get amongst the tarts and cheese-cakes, I should scream with fright, and you would yell and try to catch him, and taking it altogether there might be a pretty considerable rumpus. Napoleon,

I have discovered, is mortally afraid of rats. Hawkesbury was chaffing him the other night."

"They'll kill us afterwards," said Roddy, "but it's worth that."

"No doubt they'll be annoyed; but a pure accident, Roddy, an unexpected surprise to you as much as to them!"

Roddy gazed at his chum in admiration. "You're a corker, Peggy," he exclaimed, "a regular corker! And, as a fag, simply priceless, though I doubt whether Napoleon will need your services after to-night."

"Why not? Rattler's nothing to do with me. How am I to know you carry the little beast about in your pocket? Besides, I haven't finished with the great man. I've another card to play yet. Don't forget I've got to cure Mr. Packer's desire for a Fourth Form fag."

"How will you do that?"

"Don't know; I'm watching my chance. But to-night's the night at present. And, by the way, I shouldn't overfeed Rattler beforehand."

Roddy grinned. "Did you mention cream-tarts, Peggy? or was it a dream? Rattler's death on cream-tarts."

"Well, it will be your fault if he doesn't get 'em."

Packer purred like a contented kitten as his guests began to arrive. Certainly his fag was a treasure! He had moved in Brownlow's table, and borrowed various articles from adjoining studies. Everything in the room was neat and clean and in apple-pie order. The tables, which groaned with good cheer, were nicely laid, and would have done credit to an expert waiter. And the height of his satisfaction was reached as he reflected that his fag was a Fourth Form boy! Brownlow and

the other chumps had funk'd interfering with the Fourth, had prophesied all manner of evil, and had even advised him to let sleeping dogs lie. This would open their eyes. It would also show what an exceedingly great man he really was.

He glanced at his two fags with an air of proud proprietorship. Roddy, as the price of being allowed to help, had washed, brushed his hair, replaced several missing

William Henry, with a touch of gratitude and humility.

"Pegson's a good little chap," said Packer patronisingly, "the best fag I've ever had."

William Henry blushed to the roots of his hair; Roddy almost screamed, but checked himself in time. He looked at Packer in wonder. What a fatuous ass the chap was! How could he miss seeing



The room became a pandemonium.

buttons, and looked actually respectable. Packer purred even more loudly. Both showed the deepest respect to all his guests, but to him they were absolutely reverential. It was a brilliant triumph for Packer, and he appreciated it fully.

"By Jove, Pegson, you've done us proud," exclaimed Hawkesbury; "you and your chum deserve a medal."

"We tried to do our best," replied

they were laughing at him? However, he smoothed Rattler, who was becoming a trifle restless, and stood ready to wait on the guests.

"Fall to, gentlemen," exclaimed Packer in his grand manner; "I hope you will find the eatables to your liking."

It really was a sumptuous feast, and deserved a better fate than that in store for it. No one had eaten more than a

mouthful when a piercing cry broke from William Henry. "A rat!" he screamed in accents of terror; "oh, kill it, some one, quick!"

Rattler, bewildered at finding himself in such a land of plenty, was jumping about the table, sticking his paws into the cream, nibbling here, and breaking off there to sample some other dainty; Roddy was yelling at the top of his voice and making futile grabs at the animal; several boys jumped up hastily; one flung his cup of tea at the animal, and missed.

Meanwhile the flurried Rattler had approached Packer, and with some idea of seeking refuge in his pocket, sprang at him. Packer's face was greeny-white, his eyes dilated, drops of sweat rolled from his forehead, there could be no doubt he was in mortal dread. He made frantic efforts to dislodge the little beast, shrieking and hitting out blindly. For a Napoleon, his antics were truly funny.

The room became a pandemonium. Boys shouted advice to each other; William Henry moaned, Roddy screamed, the things were swept off the table in a grand smash and trampled upon; there was hurrying and scurrying to and fro, and a collecting of deadly weapons, and in the midst of the uproar, Rattler, who was unaccustomed to such hooligan company, quickly disappeared.

But the mischief was complete. The eatables were ruined, the cups and saucers and plates were in fragments, and Packer was in no fit condition to play the host. Hawkesbury took him off to bed, the guests departed with their hunger unappeased, and the best fag that Packer ever had proceeded with his chum's assistance to clear up the mess.

"Gorgeous," exclaimed Roddy; "did you twig Rattler trying to get into Napoleon's pocket? Rather cute, what?"

"Have you lost him?"

"Not much, watch," and he gave a long, low whistle. Almost immediately they saw a pair of bright, beady eyes, and the next minute Rattler was cuddling up against his master as if telling him of all the dangers he had gone through.

"Slip off with him before Hawkesbury comes back," his chum advised.

"Right-o, I won't be two jiffs."

They had nearly finished their job when Hawkesbury looked in. "Seen anything of the rat?" he asked.

"Oh, if you please, Hawkesbury," said Roddy in a contrite voice, "it was my rat; he must have slipped out of my pocket. I'm so sorry, I tried to tell you, but there was such a noise."

Hawkesbury stared. "D'you mean it was a tame rat?"

"Oh, yes; quite tame; he'll eat out of your hand."

"Not out of mine," said Hawkesbury with decision. "But, what a lark! Poor old Packer scared nearly to death by a tame rat! He'll never hear the end of that story."

Next day all Redlands was laughing at the unlucky incident, but only a few, and those all in the Fourth, guessed that the trick was deliberately planned. Even there, several boys declared it was just like Roddy, forgetting the beastly thing was in his pocket, and letting it slip out at the wrong time.

Packer was very sore over the business, which had made him an object of ridicule, and he gave orders that the "little idiot" should never come to his room again. But

William Henry was so humble and apologetic that peace was finally restored, and life went on very much as before.

But William Henry was getting tired of fagging, and about a fortnight after Rattler's unmannerly behaviour, he saw his opportunity of bringing it to an end, and at the same time of effectually stopping Packer from wanting any more fags from the Fourth Form.

"We've got him," he exclaimed to his chum; "he's having a card party to-night. Hawkesbury, Rogers, and Paton. You slip round on your way to the dorm. Don't make a noise, but fumble with the handle of the door as if you were trying to open it. Keep at it till you hear Packer coming, and then skedaddle. Understand?"

"Yes—but——"

"You do as you're told, my son, and ask no questions. I'll explain afterwards," and with this Roddy had to be content.

Packer and his chums sat down to their game in fancied security—they knew most of the masters were away and that there was little fear of interruption—Hawkesbury and Rogers were smoking cigs, and Packer had just told his fag he could go, when some one was heard trying the handle of the door. Then came Mr. Drage's voice, exclaiming angrily, "Packer, open the door instantly. Why have you locked it? Open at once, sir."

"Coming, sir; it isn't locked, sir," cried Packer, his teeth chattering, while his chums scattered in consternation—Rogers into the cupboard, Paton crawling under the table, and Hawkesbury flattening himself behind a screen, while the fag flung the cards into a basket and covered them with a newspaper.

With trembling fingers Packer opened the door—and gasped in astonishment. The master had gone! He looked up and down the corridor—there was no one in sight. What did Drage intend doing?

"Scoot, you fellows," he whispered, "before he comes back."

One by one, alarmed and wondering, they stole out, and Packer sat down to his books which his fag had thoughtfully placed upon the table.

"Thanks, Pegson," he murmured, "you can go now," and Pegson went.

Packer sat some time in fear and trembling, and greatly puzzled. Why had the master gone away? What would he say in the morning? Anyhow it was a lucky escape! And what a cute chap his fag was! "Sharp as a razor," he muttered; "I'll have to give him a tip."

Next day his priceless fag did not turn up, but there was a note from him on the desk. "If you please, Packer," it read, "I am afraid to come any more, my heart is too weak. I was nearly frightened to death last night. Several boys have offered to take my place, but of course I can't let any of them come. You know why. Yours very obediently, PEGSON."

"Silly little fool," was Packer's angry comment.

Still it was plain that he could not force Pegson to come back, nor would he dare to order the Fourth to provide him with a new fag. If he did, Pegson was certain to blab. But the Sixth Form boy was perplexed as well as angry, and more especially when Hawkesbury informed him that Mr. Drage was not even in the building the preceding night.

"I don't pretend to understand it," Hawkesbury said, "but in my opinion

you've been spoofed, and your priceless fag has been taking a rise—several rises, in fact—out of you. I guess the kids are grinning like Cheshire cats at the way you've been done, old man. And the cream of the joke is that you can't take any notice!"

Hawkesbury was right. The Fourth were enjoying the story immensely, and their admiration for William Henry rose to a great height.

"But how did you manage it?" Roddy asked.

"Well, in the first place," said his chum, "I'm a bit of a ventriloquist, and in the second I can mimic old Drage to a T. The fumbling with the handle made them frightfully jumpy, and they felt quite certain it was the master calling for the door to be opened. The rest was a perfect scream. Talk about a panto," and William Henry chuckled. "I reckon Napoleon won't try to interfere with the Fourth again."

THE HALF-BACK LINE IN SOCCER



Arthur F. Murray: M.A. (Hons.)

I AM fortunate to be given this opportunity of penning a few lines of advice and guidance to many young men and boys, all equally eager for athletic kudos. Few people know such lads better than I do. My lot has been cast among them for many years, and it has been a source of great joy and an appreciated privilege to be in a position to coach some of the best boys in the West of Scotland, which was the cradle and which still remains the nursery of the game of football. Now it is a common fault with youths to pay too little attention to the voice of experience. So I would advise you all to study with due care the suggestions which I offer with a view to improving your game. With this brief premonition let me proceed.

As centre-half was my own position on the field, I may appear to some to be biased in appraising the relative importance

of the intermediate line in the team, but critics and players alike now readily admit the vital influence of this trio on the general success of the eleven. How often do we hear — “How could — win matches? they have no half-backs!” or “How could the — lose matches with two such wing halves as they have?” There never existed a star combination with a weakling at centre-half-back. The same amount of driving power is not demanded from the wing halves, but on the flanks football skill is more essential than in the centre. Occasionally we hear a representative of the old school deploring the poverty in goal scoring by modern forwards. But let our detractor pause to reflect that in his far-off day there were only two half-backs; but, on the other hand, six forwards, with two in the centre. The method of attack with this early

formation is obvious to the veriest tyro of to-day. There being no pivot in the team, a wedge was driven between the unprotected flanks of the defence. The centre was the point of attack; nowadays the frontal attack is adopted merely to add variety to the method. With only two half-backs, goal-scoring was, as it would be still, inevitable.

Now let me outline some of the qualities which are indispensable to young middlemen. In the first place, you must be enthusiasts. The game is called Association Football because you associate yourself, *i.e.*, combine with the other ten members to carry your team to victory. But you are to be enthusiastic not for self-glory, but for the renown of the side. You must love your colours with enthusiasm. What does this enthusiasm mean? Simply this: You are to deny yourselves many pleasures; you are to work hard (I mean by work, *train*); you are to improve your speed; you are to enhance your stamina till no game can be too hard for you. All this, too, for the love of your colours. But, of course, you have personal pride in the tribute which you are paying to the united success. Remember that nothing will lift a half-back more quickly above the average line than *pace*. It is a point too often lost sight of by young players. As a matter of fact it is stamina and pace much more than dexterity with the ball that distinguishes one class of football from another. If a half-back line is not perfectly fit, when the strain comes, the forwards are not plied with passes and the backs must fend for themselves. Why? Well, the halves soon become leg-weary and are content to part with the ball anyhow, if they are fit even to get into occasional possession. To

attain to an adequate standard of physical efficiency, a certain amount of sprinting is necessary, preferably in spikes: a quarter-mile, ay, a half-mile on the track followed by several sprints, or, to colour the routine, long walks in the country are the vogue at the start of the season. But once a player is fit all he needs in the way of running to conserve his condition is short, sharp bursts of from about 30 to 50 yards. There is a prevalent tendency among young enthusiasts to make their development lop-sided. Now you must look after your bodies and arms, as well as your legs. Müller exercises can be gone through in the most circumscribed spaces, but if a punch-ball is available, so much the better. Remember, too, that if the weather is favourable all training should be conducted in the open air.

A thoroughly fit player's enthusiasm will carry him far. In the closing stages of the game, when the struggle gets tenser and tenser, the fit man can put in that little bit of extra, which makes all the difference between victory and defeat. The demands on the staying powers of a half-back are so exacting that he must keep himself trained to the minute. For the halves, all three, must attack with the forwards. Never, no never, let there be an apparent gap between these two lines of attack. If one of your forwards loses possession and the enemy's lines are cleared, in a trice you are swept back to the help of the full backs. But if the clearance does not carry over the heads of your line, you must pounce tiger-like on the ball and instantaneously push it to the best-placed forward to renew the process of wearing down the foe. So physical fitness is the handmaid of enthusiasm.

What about the build of "soccer" halves? Well, the pivot should be generously endowed by nature. In fact, in all positions height and weight carry enormous advantages. It is a commonplace remark we all hear these days: "A fine player, very tricky, BUT too small." Let us recall some of the giants who have filled and still fill this vital position. To-day there is no modern centre-half who can challenge comparison with C. Thomson in stature. He was the despair of opponents, whether he carried the colours of the "Hearts," of "Sunderland," or of "Scotland." He simply dominated a game. He was a super centre-half in the matter of physique and driving power.

Powerful in frame, too, was Alick Raisbeck, but with a subtlety in movement alien to the big man from Preston. Raisbeck, in my opinion, was the greatest centre-half of all nations and of all times. His thrilling display against England in 1908 at Hampden is still green in the memory of the many thousands who were favoured to witness it. He was tall, fast, with a springy step, and no one ever headed a ball as strongly and as accurately as he did on that international day. The greatest centre-half of the far-off days was the famous Charlie Campbell, now a prosperous farmer in County Wicklow, Ireland. He was the first great header of a ball. This art is now indispensable to a half-back of all players. He must learn to clear smashingly regardless of direction. On the other hand he must become an accomplished performer in the art of nodding on a ball to the best-placed forward in front of him. A young aspirant, however, who is lacking in inches must not despair

of "striking the stars with his head." Two of England's greatest pivots were almost diminutive in stature, but giants in the struggle. J. Holt of Everton and W. Wedlock of Bristol were for years unanimous selections in the English team versus Scotland. But why did they oust all their brawny competitors? They had such superlative pace and vitality, linked with almost incredible ball-control, that their rivals never seriously dropped the gauntlet. They were what schoolboys call "great football players."

With regard to the best position for the captain of a team, the centre-half is now accepted as the ideal one. He can command the whole field with eye and voice. He cheers his defence to deeds of defiance, and spurs his forwards to feats of scoring. He is ubiquitous. His energy is restless. His voice is ever heard. That is another feature which I might touch on, *en passant*. Speech-play is not forbidden. And so a captain should be assiduous in his instructions. To his wing-halves in position he should indicate the player lying in the best position for receiving the pass with an "Alick Smith" (*i.e.*, pass forward to Alick Smith, who is the outside-left of the discussed eleven), or, "Quick, pass back to Willie Wiseman" (*i.e.*, pass back to Willie Wiseman, the left-back of the same eleven), and so on.

What of the supports to the pivot? Well, the wing halves evince the same restless energy in defence and attack as the centre. What a glorious experience to play half when thoroughly fit! The wing-half must be fast. Speed is more necessary on the flank than in the centre of the half-back line in soccer. The wing half has no time to shape his passes, and he must be prepared

to speed through on occasion for a shot at goal when all his opponents expect him to pass. While this scheme is in operation, the inside forward must drop back to half-back. This expedient of half-back and forward or inside and outside forwards interchanging places is a device which often takes an opponent by surprise. As in warfare, so in football, the element of surprise is a rudimentary principle.

The understanding between right-half and right-wing or left-half and left-wing should be perfect. The wing-half must learn to draw an opponent off his own forward and then slip on the ball to the uncovered man. This can be attained only by learning to trap a ball swiftly (practice makes it mechanical) before an opponent is "on" you. The harmony in the movement of the Sunderland right-half and right-wing of a few years ago—F. Cuggy, J. Mordue, and C. Buchan—led to the modern coinage, "the human triangle." The understanding between these three clubmen, thought out off, practised and perfected on the field, has never been excelled. This triangular menace moved forward as one man to threaten every fort which they encountered. Nowadays triangular play on the wing is rightly, as I think, much courted. The above movement works as follows: the half-back (wing) slips the ball to the inside-forward, who is uncovered; the latter runs on in possession, draws the opposing half or back and pushes out the ball to the unhampered winger to dash through, "middle," or shoot. A cutting-in forward is a most dangerous customer to deal with. Scotsmen and Englishmen, especially the good folks about Blackburn, Lancs., still remember the deadly work of Jocky Simpson. On the

right wing of Falkirk F.C., of Blackburn Rovers, and the English League, Simpson displayed wonderful speed without a doubt. He could "swerve" a ball as no one before him or after him has ever done, but the most destructive work he wrought his foes was by cutting into centre and shooting. In other words it is the surprise element that wins.

I think it is well that there should be a pre-arrangement between the wing-half and the back (and that the pivot, too, should know about it). The intermediate player should cover the opposing outside forward, and the full-back the opposing inside forward, or vice versa. But you must not be too slavish in your methods. Circumstances may compel you to ignore this compact for the moment. Many players refuse to "crib, cabin, and confine" themselves by such pre-commitments, but, as the game proceeds, the back shouts instructions to his wing man: "Watch the inside-left!" or "Cover the left-half!" as seems most fit from time to time. A. Cowan of Queen's Park was about to take the field in 1919 in his first representative match; he expected that Alick M'Nair of Celtic, who was to play immediately behind him, would come to such a pre-arrangement. "Which man will I take, Alick, outside or inside?" was the query, and promptly came the reply from the pawky Scottish full-back: "It's a' richt, Archie; I'll tell you during the game."

Accurate placing is one of the first essentials in the wing half-back's equipment. A forward must receive accurate passes or you cannot look for success from his efforts. If your wing forward is very fast, the half-back must draw the opposing middleman and pass to the uncovered

inside forward ; thereafter the latter pushes the ball well past the opposing back for the speed-merchant to burst through, centre, or shoot.

Let the wing half-back practise the art of shooting. He is not to shoot incessantly, but rarely will a game pass without offering him the chance of a drive. How often can he exploit this art by unexpectedly smashing in a ball from a corner ! Neil Gibson, the famous Rangers right-half of two decades ago, scored many goals for his side with such surprise efforts, while a successor of his, James E. Gordon, was unexcelled at this lucrative department of the game. Arthur Grimsdell of Tottenham Hotspur, was yet another brilliant example of a scoring half, both for his club and for his country. Accuracy in shooting can be acquired in many ways. Practice is, of course, an essential element. Most players favour ball practice with the football, which they are called to control every Saturday, but not all. C. B. Fry, one of the greatest athletes of all time, an all-England cricketer, and a brilliant Corinthian footballer, used to improve his accuracy in directing the normal football by shooting practice with a tennis ball. His contention was that he found it easy to perform with the ordinary football after the undersized sphere. Try it !

Variety I have touched on, but sufficient prominence has not been given to this quality. No doubt the wing half must concentrate his attention in the way of support on the men immediately in front of him, but he must surprise the opposition by occasionally sweeping a pass across the field to the other wing. This opens up the game to a wonderful degree, and no half-back can afford to discard this device.

Re corner kicks, let me say a word. Here half-backs can play havoc. To-day the tendency with forwards taking a corner kick is to cut it too fine, making it simple for the goalkeeper to fist clear. Let the kicker rather square the ball just enough to incapacitate the keeper from clearing but at the same time sufficiently near him to entice him from his post. It is usually disastrous for a goalkeeper to leave his goal without clearing his lines. Again, by way of varying your methods, let the corner kick be, on occasion, sent back for the centre-half to drive strongly for the net. On such an occasion, owing to the congestion in the goalmouth, the "guarder" has little or no freedom of movement to get over to a fast ball travelling away from him. Forwards may be induced to cut their corner kicks fine by the new rule just adopted by the International Association Board, which reads that a corner kick finding the net direct, that is, without touching a second player, is a goal. This happens so rarely, however, that a moment's reflection should dispel from the minds of young footballers its apparent attraction. With this slight digression on corners, we return to "The Half-back Line in Soccer."

The throwing-in of a ball from the touch-line is an art which is now sadly neglected. In fact so stereotyped is the method of throwing-in a ball that the side which gains the "shy" is really penalised, for the player throwing-in is really put out of action, and yet how men sometimes squabble over a throw ! Two points should be cleared up here. Firstly, the player throwing-in from "tough" must have a part of both feet on the line. Mark you, this does not prevent him standing on his toes.

Secondly, the ball must be thrown with both hands from over the head. These two points are plain and obvious, and yet scarcely a game is played in First League football without an infringement of this rule.

In conclusion, I should advise the youth who wishes to become a half-back to model his style preferably on that of some outstanding player, who has the same type of physical attributes as himself. Let the young enthusiast watch intently and discern wherein his pattern excels his fellows, then let him practise the merits of his senior model. The faults which are inherent in his own play must be eradicated by patient, persistent practice. This feature, *i.e.*, the deletion of faults by actual practice, should form part of every youth's training. Walter Arnot of Queen's Park, the doyen of all full backs, when he discovered during a game that he could not take a ball in a particular position with easy precision, did not sleep over his fault. At the earliest

opportunity he went out to the club ground and practised this position for days—for weeks, if need be—till he had mastered his defect. So with you young half-backs, practise, practise, practise, but always with a clear eye to improvement. For the line to which you are aspiring is the sea-wall on which the waves of attack must break, while it is the motive power for the forward line in all their raids on the enemy lines. What a joy for a half-back to prance on to the field, teeming with energy, replete with club enthusiasm, conscious all the time that what really counts is “the half-back line in soccer.”

Youthful half-backs, I wish you joy. Follow the advice I have given you. Read my advice again AND again. It was a great joy for me to fill the position in Queen's Park. These halcyon days I look back on with unalloyed pleasure. In your efforts to excel, good luck, boys, one and all.

Cæstus artemque repono.



"Gunner"

Tom Beran

I WAS in Kington, paying a mid-term visit to my hopeful young nephew who was at school there. Kington is a pretty, but sleepy place, tucked away amongst the hills of the West Countrie. There is the village with a population of, maybe, three hundred quiet souls, and the famous school with a population in term time of double that number; and this major part of the dwellers in Kington is by no means quiet or sleepy. The village is old and charming, with the usual narrow, winding street of dwelling-houses and shops, mixed up together anyhow, and a fine church at the western end; a few lanes lined with cottages break off at intervals from the line of the street. Half of the shops are there because of the school, and not to satisfy the needs of the villagers or the farmers around. On that warm afternoon in June, when I walked the length of the street with my nephew to

regale him at the best of three confectionery establishments, the place seemed to be nodding in its sleep. The grocer stood at his door because it was on the shady side of the street, the postman walked the other side because he had letters to deliver there, and several dogs lay in the sun because they liked it. The street would soon be livelier because a goodly portion of the Lower School were on their way behind us, not feeling violently interested in a House match that was in progress at the school, a mile and a half away.

"Jolly hot!" remarked my nephew.

"Do the police fine folks for breaking the silence of this town of Nod?" I asked.

My nephew grinned. "The houses don't exactly shout, do they?" he said.

"I can imagine a hawker getting forty shillings or a month for calling pots and pans."

"We wake it up at times, you know, uncle."

"I've no doubt you do, but it doesn't stay awake for long."

"Last week was the time; you ought to have been here."

"I wish I had been. What happened? Is it a story?"

"Top-hole! A scream! As good as the Pictures. It would have made a rattling good film. The wild and woolly west in Kington."

"You shall tell me over the tea-cups; only remember that I object to boys talking fast with their mouths full."

My nephew grinned again. "Have your little joke," he said.

We walked on, and the grocer watched us, whilst one dog was curious enough to get up, stroll across, and sniff at my heels. A boy came out of the post office, and at once my nephew became excited. "Why, here is Gunner!"

I looked ahead and saw a boy in a Kington School blazer and boater who was evidently chewing toffee or some sweetmeat that needed considerable mastication. I thought we were the first to get to the village, but here was one who had outstripped us and got busy. "Who exactly is Gunner?" I asked.

"Oh, he is Potter, in Rogers' House; I don't know him very well. Since last week and for ever he is Gunner."

"The young desperado who held up the township in true woolly west fashion?" I inquired.

"No, he held up the chap who tried to hold up the village."

"He's the popular hero, not the popular villain, then?"

"He's great!" exclaimed my nephew

enthusiastically. "I wish I knew him better."

"Like all great men he is a bit unapproachable, I suppose. Do you think the offer of a good tea would help you to get on easy terms with the Gunner?"

"My nephew looked up. "Do you mean it, uncle?"

"Of course I do. I have a kindly feeling for youthful heroes, and a sneaking regard for the cowboy that shoots up a town. You see, I was a boy once upon a time."

"Yes, of course," murmured my nephew, and by the pucker in his forehead I could see that he was wondering what sort of boy I was in those "once upon a time" days. Promptly, I added, "You may tell the gallant Gunner that I am rather rich, and very generous."

"I have always said of you, uncle, that you do know the way to tip a chap decently."

"Thank you, nephew Robert," I answered. "I am proud to have your good opinion."

We were approaching the Gunner. "Have a good look at him; we'll pass by and I can run back after him," said Robert.

"Just as you like," I replied; "you will know the proper way to tackle heroes. I never meet any nowadays." We met Gunner; he eyed me pretty shrewdly, and winked at my nephew, who blushed. I also took a good look at Gunner. He was a stocky, rosy sort of boy, firm of mouth, and apparently possessed cool nerves and a decent opinion of himself. My nephew was eyeing me and awaiting my judgment. "Gunner appears to be all there," I said. "To speak idiomatically, Robert, there are no flies on Gunner."

"Not one, uncle."

A few yards farther my nephew stopped, and obedient to a tug at my coat I stopped also. "We'll just pretend to talk and then I will dash back for Gunner," he said.

"As you like," I replied. "We will be as diplomatic as possible." I cocked a thoughtful eye along the little, dusty street and observed that Gunner had stopped too, and was keeping a wary eye on us. I would have laid a small wager ~~that he was calculating~~ how many cream buns, puffed tarts, meringues and ices I was prepared, as a good uncle, to stand my nephew, and how many the latter could eat on so hot an afternoon. "I think the Gunner will honour us," I remarked.

My nephew "dashed" back according to arrangement. The meeting was interesting. Nephew Robert was excited, Gunner cool and still chewing toffee, or whatever it was. His boater was tipped back on his head, and his hands were in his pockets. I looked forward to an interesting half-hour. The two strolled back and I was duly introduced. The Gunner was easy and affable, and I believe I made a good first impression. I invited him to join us at Butterway's, and he consented in the heartiest manner. As we passed the post office the old post-mistress looked out at the doorway and I heard her murmur, "Dear boy!" As my nephew didn't blush, I knew she could not be referring to him. Then the butcher, who, like the grocer, dwelt on the shady side of the street and was at his door, waved his large and red hand to us, and Gunner waved back. The final honour came to us just before we reached Butterway's window. An oily and smelly youth staggered past under the burden of a big can of reeking paraffin, but he collected

enough breath to mutter hoarsely, "Cheerio, Sexton Blake!"

"Ass!" exclaimed Gunner modestly.

We entered Butterway's, which was tastefully and artfully laid out to tempt the pocket-money of the Kingtonians, and the neat waitresses smiled upon Gunner and then upon me, doubtless honouring me with blood-relationship to the local celebrity, and I felt that it was up to me to do things handsomely. My nephew selected the table and put Gunner on my right hand. A very pretty waitress came and hovered about us, all smiles, and I turned my attention to her. "My dear," I said, "for myself a cup of tea and a slice of brown bread and butter; for these young gentlemen, whatever they may call for. I make only one condition. If by chance they should ask for anything that is not of the very best you have, correct their error and bring the best. They must judge for themselves when they have had enough. Medical attendance is, fortunately, included in their boarding fees, and you and I need not worry."

"No, sir," laughed the pretty maid, and then turned to Gunner. He looked at my nephew.

"Tea, of course," said Robert, "and then bring something of everything that is really top-hole. That do, Gunner?"

"A 1," cried Gunner. "We needn't eat the lot, of course."

"No, just pick and choose according to fancy."

They did. Those boys did my purse and Butterway's bakehouse full credit; they were a little redder, a little greasier, a little more sticky after the feast than before, but they sat there full of pastry and satisfaction, and I hoped the school

doctor kept a large bottle of mixture to suit cases such as theirs. I had watched both during the meal to see which was the better trencherman as to input and time. Gunner won on points. As they were too full to want to move for a while I considered how I might reap my reward by way of Gunner's thrilling story. 'I looked to my nephew to lead the hero on, but he showed a distinct inclination to fall asleep. This was not playing the game, since he knew the terms upon which I had offered the Gunner unlimited tuck. Perhaps it was too much to expect Robert's memory to struggle through the rampart of pastry he had built up, so I took matters in my own hands. "My nephew tells me you played a leading part in a crook drama last week, Potter."

Gunner smiled the smile of perfect contentment. "There was a bit of a how-d'ye-do, sir."

"Any deaths?"

"No, sir, but I think the chap was scared stiff. Affected me the other way round, gave me sort of ague in the knees."

"I know the feeling; too many slaves have bowed the knee for that joint to be really courageous."

Gunner eyed me to discover if I was pulling his leg below the knee, and decided that I was not. "Never looked at it in that way, sir."

"Perhaps it is an odd point of view," I answered.

"Sounds all right to me."

"Then there must be something in it. Do you mind telling me the story? I am rather fond of a good yarn."

Gunner fidgeted. "Well, sir, I was right in the thick of it. It's awkward gassing about yourself, isn't it? Everybody

knows the story. I dare say Wilmot knows it better than I do. You see, at times I was hidden and could not see what was going on." He turned to my nephew, who was showing signs of becoming wide awake. "You tell your uncle, Wilmot."

"All right, but you switch me straight if I get off the rails." My nephew fixed my attention with his eye. "Gunner's got a gun."

I nodded, and said I had guessed so much. My nephew went on: "Gunner's got a gun, a toy, of course, but it looks real; made just like an automatic. It fires a percussion cap and makes a deuce of a row when it goes off. He nearly got swished by the Head for blazing off in Long Corridor last term."

I looked at Gunner, who grinned his agreement with this statement. I smiled sympathy, and said, "Go on, Robert."

"Gunner came into the village because he had run out of caps, and Todd the ironmonger was out of them but thought Miss Teagle at the post office might have some, as she used to stock them, but gave up because the chaps used to buy them there and always try them in the shop and make her jump." That was as much narrative as Robert could manage in one breath, so I waited. He went on.

"Miss Teagle had some all right, and was glad to sell Gunner the lot cheap."

"Threepence," said Gunner, "and she begged me not to hurry out."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "this is where you ought to take up the story, Gunner. Eye-witness, you know."

Gunner cleared his throat of the stickiness due to an overdose of pastry. "The old lady seemed scared, fidgeted about with her hands, and kept looking through the door. I looked, and saw a fellow hanging



It got him clean on the hat.

about on the other side. He appeared to be decent, and I said so. She shook her head and asked me if I knew him. I didn't. Well, I kept my eyes on him, and then I didn't like him; he stared too much at me and Miss Teagle. The street was empty, of course."

I nodded.

"Miss Teagle said, 'Are there many of you young gentlemen about this afternoon?' I said there were only a few, as most of them were practising for the sports, and I had come in to get some caps to act as starter in the trials. She seemed upset at this, and asked me if I would care for a cup of tea. This was funny. Then she said had I read the papers lately, and had I noticed what a lot of lonely post offices had been held up, especially where only a woman was keeping them. Well, I

had read that much, and told her so. This made her more nervous, and I was sorry I had agreed with her; but she had asked for it."

"Decidedly," I commented; "and it was quite true."

"I put a cap in my pistol, ready to bang off when I got outside. I wouldn't let off inside, as I had meant to do, because she seemed so scared."

"Very thoughtful of you, Potter. Go on."

"Then she said, would I go out, slip round the corner by the cobbler's, come in the back way, and stay for a few minutes under her counter. She would give me my threepence back and send for a gross of new caps and give them to me for nothing. I said I would, and I did: she's a good sort, and some of our chaps had played up a bit rough at times, and she never reported them."

"I like Miss Teagle."

"I got under the counter, and then things happened. How I did what I did I don't know. All of a sudden she whispered, 'He's coming; get your pistol ready!' The next moment I heard the man's step in the shop. He walked to the counter and said, politely enough, 'Six penny stamps, please!' Miss Teagle opened the drawer just above my head, and then the voice changed. 'Stop!' he cried, regular hoarse whisper, you know, 'open the other drawer and give me the money. Make a sound, and I'll shoot you!' And poor old miss gave a whimper, just like a frightened kid."

"And that got your blood up," I said understandingly.

"It did. Quick as lightning I pushed my hand up above the edge of the counter and showed the barrel of the pistol. 'Hands up!' I shouted, right from the bottom of my chest, and nearly scared to hear how deep my voice sounded. 'Hands up! you villain; we have been waiting for you all the afternoon.' I heard the fellow gasp, and poor Miss Teagle sigh with relief. She was plucky, too, said out as clear as could be, 'You waited too long, my man; we were ready to trap you.' 'Gosh!' he said, and I knew that his hands were up. What to do next I could not think, for I dare not show myself and give the whole game away. But old Fatty Nobbs, the grocer, was wide awake. He'd had his suspicions, and when the fellow didn't come out, he just strolled across, thought he'd buy a few stamps. As he walked in through the doorway the chap turned and his hands dropped. This set his brain thinking again, and quick as thought he knocked

Nobbs aside and bolted, Nobbs shouting after him, 'Thief! Thief! Stop thief!' If there was going to be a chase I meant to be in it, and I hopped the counter sharp. 'After him!' yelled Nobbs, but he was too fat to run himself, and so stood on the pavement to do the shouting. I was off down the street, the grocer's boy, the butcher's boy, and the oil-can kid putting on the pace as well. Remembering I had my pistol loaded, I banged off ~~and at~~ the very minute, Johnson Minor of Wilmot's form shied a store after the runaway. It got him clean on the hat just as my old gun barked, and his hat went flying. He thought a bullet had gone clean through it, stopped dead, bent down nearly double to miss the next shot, and I fired again and old Nobbs yelled like a Trojan hero. The shop kids hooted, the blacksmith ran out with a hammer in his hand, and the next minute I came bang into the chap and knocked him flat on his face. That was the time the bobby hove into view."

"The majesty of the law is sometimes a little slow, Potter," I remarked.

"True, sir, but it's sure; at least P.C. Phipson made no mistake: nabbed the robber before I could scramble off him. We all helped to escort him to the police station. The Rector, who is a magistrate, was sent for, and we all gave our evidence. The chap is in the county jail now. And that's all there is to the story."

"And a very good all. My congratulations, Potter, and if you would care to spend a week or so with Wilmot at my little place in Somerset, well, I shall be glad to make your better acquaintance."

"And I like you, sir. Thank you, I'll come."

Chemical Magic for All.

Colour Juggling

By W. G. BOSWORTH

THE startling and instantaneous changing of the colour of liquids has always been viewed by those not in the secret as being on the point of magic, as indeed it appears to be. The magicians of old delighted in such accomplishments, and invariably declared that they had invoked the aid of evil spirits, if not the arch-fiend himself, for their purpose.

The changing of water into wine seemed to declare that the magician who could do this could certainly concoct an effective love-potion, and no doubt brought many love-lorn damsels to the performer of such startling wonders. My readers who delight in posing as wonder-workers can easily change water into wine; water to ink; wine into milk, by enlisting the wonderful aid of chemistry.

To do the first trick, or to change water magically into wine, all the chemicals we need are permanganate of potash, sulphuric acid, and hyposulphite of soda (the hypo of the photographer), and our apparatus need only consist of two wine glasses and two decanters.

Dissolve one gramme of the potash and two grammes of the acid in a quart of water, and a red liquid is produced. This can be instantly decolourised by pouring

into it a few drops of the hypo solution mixed exactly as for fixing a plate after development.

To present the trick in the most effective fashion, obtain two wine decanters and fill one with clear water and the other with the manufactured "wine." Then stick into the bottom of a wine glass a pinch of aniline dye mixed to a paste with glycerine. Pour a few drops of strong hypo solution into the other glass. Produce the decanters and then ask some member of your audience to pour out the wine. Directly the "wine" is poured into the hypo glass it will become clear water, and the water poured into the glass treated with dye will become rich, red wine. Startling, is it not?

To make ink from water, obtain a glass and pour into it two drops of perchloride of iron. Fill a decanter with water and add as much tannin as will just cover a sixpence. Make your announcement and then, with a flourish, pour the water from the decanter into the glass. It will be ink.

To make milk from wine seems impossible, but it can be done easily. Fill a glass with "wine" made up as follows. Add a little sodium carbonate to some phenolphthalein,

more of the former than the latter. To turn the wine to milk add calcium chloride and tartaric acid. The change is almost imperceptible yet extremely realistic.

It will cause no little incredulity should you announce that you can produce five differently coloured liquids from a glass jug full of clear water; pour them all back into the jug, and still have clear water. A little sleight of hand is necessary to accomplish this successfully, for the jugs must be secretly changed. You should have two jugs exactly alike, and it is necessary to substitute the second jug for the first *after* filling the glasses. The second jug should contain chlorine water equal to the amount of water left in the first jug after the five glassfuls were poured out.

Next obtain five tumblers and previously place in them a little phenolphthalein for red; methyl orange for yellow; litmus solution for blue; chlorophyll for green; and a dye for violet. Place them all in a row in colour order. Lift up the first

jug containing pure water and fill up the first glass, confidently saying "Red." The contents of the other glasses can be foretold by saying "Yellow," "Blue," "Green," and "Violet" before each glass is filled up. Quickly substitute glass jug number two containing the chlorine water and pour back the contents of the glasses. The chlorine water will bleach the colours, and the exhibition of a jug full of clear water will conclude a really remarkable demonstration.

Perhaps some general hints will be appreciated by young magicians.

For the best results in all experiments use only distilled water. Have all your jugs and glasses scrupulously clean, and practise the experiments time after time until you feel sufficiently confident to perform them in public. Such incidental dodges as doctoring glasses must, of course, be done before the actual demonstration, and do not under any circumstances drink any of the "wine" or "milk" you concoct.



CHAPTER I

I GET A COMMISSION

IF any one had prophesied that I, Richard Ponsonby, despite the physical disability of a club-foot, would achieve that for which I had so often yearned with an ever-increasing earnestness, namely, to serve my king and country in a military capacity, verily would I have laughed the prophet to scorn. How often had I sat with heavy heart brooding over the misfortune which seemed to have condemned me to a semi-active life,^a and listened with a mind all too full of envy to the gleeful conversation of my brothers Ted and Tom, as they revelled in the prospect of carrying on the military traditions of the Ponsonby family.

When the bolt fell in our midst which

destroyed at once all hope of an army career for my brothers, their disappointment was in no degree less bitter than my own. The old, old story of trust betrayed and the flight of the culprit brought about change of circumstances, and the prospect of martial glory had perforce to be discarded for the less pleasing one of commerce.

But, though the idea of a stool in an office appealed to neither one of us, there was no hesitation in our acceptance of the offer of a business life when it came. Indeed, since it meant life in the colonies, and not the stuffy atmosphere of a city office, we welcomed the opportunity warmly, regarding it as some compensation for the misfortune which had befallen us. That the colony to which we were destined—Nigeria—was not the healthiest of spots did not disturb us one whit, for the prospect of a more or less out-of-door occupation,

in our minds, more than balanced any evil of this description. And so a few weeks after the news of the loss of our fortune found us in the service of the Nigerian Trading Company at Asaba, the headquarters of that firm.

Our life at Asaba—our desperate struggles with native tribes—my capture by the Abassi—and the incredible escape of their Chief Saludamin, has all been described by me elsewhere, but as this chief, Saludamin, was the evil spirit which dogged our footsteps throughout our stay in West Africa, it behoves me, even at the expense of reiteration, to describe as to what manner of man this was.

Strange though it may seem, this very Saludamin had been a schoolfellow of ours at Syston, and, from the first moment that we had set eyes upon him, the seeds of antipathy had been disseminated. He it was who had emphasised my disability, and in consequence of my uneven method of locomotion had conferred upon me the nickname of "Dot-and-Carry-One," which thereby created a feud between my brother Ted and Salad that lasted throughout our school days, and ended only with the death of the latter.

In the first term Ted had inflicted on Salad a rare hiding owing to the nigger's insistent foul play on the football field, and from that time onwards Salad was for ever trying to get a bit of his own back. But in this he was peculiarly unfortunate, for, so far from meeting with any success in this direction, everything went the reverse way.

Unquestionably a fine Soccer player and a year senior to Ted, he had no small reason to regard the captaincy of the school team as a certainty for himself when the

time came. It was not to be, however, and he had to swallow the bitter pill of Ted officiating instead. But severe as this shock had been, he was to receive one even more so, for slack play caused him to be left out of the all-important game of the season, namely the Final of the County Cup. To the unbalanced mind of the half-caste, this action appeared to him as a shabby trick on the part of Ted, and he openly threatened that if he, Salad—was to take no part in the final, neither should Ted himself.

This was, of course, dismissed at once as an idle threat, but on the eve of the Final, disaster befell Ted. Whilst in the act of pointing out a place on the large map which hung on the wall of our study, Ted's right hand was transfixed to the wall by a curious hafted knife, hurled with force through the open window. The ownership of that weapon was, through my instrumentality, traced to Salad, who, after being publicly thrashed, was expelled from Syston College. On the eve of embarkation to West Africa, he had written vowing vengeance on Ted, and prophesying that the time would be not long distant before they met again.

Now, as we were then ignorant of the loss of our patrimony and the possibility of ever seeing the nigger again seemed so remote, we laughed to scorn the contents of that letter. When, however, events so turned out that we were destined to journey to the very district which sheltered him whom we now recognised as an implacable enemy, I, for one, must plead to a certain uneasiness.

Up to the time of which I am about to relate, Salad had on two occasions almost achieved his revenge, but, though success

had been so near at hand for him, by a whirl of fortune's wheel the tables had been turned on the second occasion, and only by the courageous action of swimming across an alligator-infested river had he himself escaped falling into Ted's hands. We had been out in Nigeria at the time of this incident some three years, and three most eventful years had they indeed been for us, for, amongst other stormy incidents, happened the discovery of our guardian and the subsequent restitution of our patrimony.

The position of affairs when we arrived back from our adventure with Salad and his tribe—the Abassis—was such that, did we so will, we could at once relinquish our connection with the Nigerian Trading Company and return to England to take up the careers originally mapped out for us. My twin brothers had already attained their majority, and I was within a few months of so doing, so that such a plan seemed still feasible, but long before we reached Asaba on the downward trek our minds were firmly made up on one point—the most essential point—namely, that our future careers would be carved out in the land which had given to us our first taste of home life.

In the case of Ted and Tom I suspected another consideration weighed with their decision, for I had not been blind to the fact that Millicent and Hilda Peck, our chief's daughters, had considerable attraction for them. It can be imagined then, especially as our long-contemplated holiday to England was immediately due, in what high spirits and glee we raced down the gangway to greet Mr. Peck on our arrival at Asaba. You can also figure to yourself our consternation when the first words

which fell from his lips banished at once those pleasant dreams of holidays.

"War declared against Germany yesterday," said Mr. Peck, "and volunteers are urgently required. To you, of course, the news must be astonishing, but here at Asaba we have been expecting the announcement for some time now. I needn't ask what you fellows intend to do, and I only wish that I were young enough to have a cut in myself. The Lagos boat comes in the day after to-morrow, so that we shall have to get a move on if we are to fit you out in some sort of trim before she comes. You'll get your khaki trappings at Lagos, so we haven't to bother our heads about that. However, we've forty-eight hours to get ship-shape, so come along and make the best of the time, for who knows how long it will be before you see Asaba again."

The news that in so short a while I was destined to achieve, in spite of my infirmity, that for which I had so stoutly yearned, namely, to fight for king and country, stirred me deeply. That, after my exploits in the up-country brushes with hostile natives, I might be deemed unfit for military service never entered my head for a moment. Judge, then, of my consternation when, after dinner that evening, the matter of Ted and Tom's outfit was discussed, and never a suggestion uttered regarding that of my own. I listened patiently for some time until I could bear the subtle insinuation of my incapacity no longer, and when the conversation was at a lull I quietly demanded of Mr. Peck his opinion as to what branch of the service I should volunteer for.

"My dear Dick," was his reply, "it's no good your contemplating joining up—no doctor would pass you. You'll do just

as good service here, helping in the outfitting of the troops, as you would at Lagos or any other port. Don't forget that this campaign will be fought out on foot, under circumstances of rough going which will be sufficiently trying to the soundest of limbs. Disappointing though it may be to you, my lad, there is nothing for it but to make the best of it."

By no means disheartened by his attitude, I set myself to combat his views on my apparent disability, quoting as a proof of my fitness the fact that on neither one of the trips up-country had I proved a laggard on the march. I appealed to Ted and Tom to bear me out in this, which they both did, but this, notwithstanding, appeared to have small effect in shaking Mr. Peck's conviction as to my unfitness. It was only after lengthy argument that at length he so far yielded as to consent to allow me to accompany the party to Lagos, there to take my chance.

When we entered the barracks at Lagos towards the end of that week, every corner of the big square was occupied by squads of eager recruits undergoing the first trials of drills, and everywhere one saw preparations being made for the establishment of a vast camp. The zeal with which the black levies responded to the "left-right, left-right" of their instructors' voices left me in rather an envious mood, and, as the moment drew nearer for my visit to the Medical Board, I began to see my chances of acceptance recede in the distance.

Although I do not think I could be considered to be possessed of a highly-strung temperament, yet I must plead guilty to distinct nervousness on more than one occasion, but at no time have I ever

experienced so blatant a moment of sheer funk as when, in answer to my call, I tramped up the room to face the M.O. of the Nigerian Rifles. I felt at every step my limp becoming more and more exaggerated, and by the time I did arrive at the desk I was more fit to drop than answer the questions levelled at me. Indeed, I expected to be dismissed without having to undergo any further examination. But to my great joy this fate did not befall me, and I was examined as soundly as had been the case of the recruits who had preceded me.

It was not until the afternoon that I learnt my fate, when, with Ted and Tom, I was summoned to the Headquarters' Office, there to be informed that all three of us had been granted temporary commissions, myself in the Intelligence Department, and Ted and Tom in the Nigerian Rifles. To me the news seemed almost too good to be true, and for some time afterwards I felt as if I were walking on air. We were no strangers to the authorities at Lagos, and the knowledge that we had had some experience of native warfare stood us in good stead, for our outfit was no sooner completed than all three of us were once more on the track.

We had left Major Currie engaged in the task of inquiring into the recent trouble with the Abassis, and our purpose was to join him with a strong reinforcement of seasoned troops. Under Major Currie's charge, Kuka was to be formed into a base, from which operations could be conducted along the frontiers, and also into the interior of German West Africa itself. With the exception of the Abassi, all the tribes in that neighbourhood were friendly disposed to us, and the prospect

had compelled Salad to strike his flag. Thoroughly well equipped and carrying extra rifles for the recruits whom we hoped to enlist in our service, we embarked with light hearts and a feeling of confidence that the Union Jack of Old England would, ere long, be flying over Duala, the capital of German West Africa.

When, seven weeks from the day of our leaving Lagos, we passed the outposts, and marched into Kuka, we found Major Currie engaged on the final preparations for his return to Lagos, having brought successfully to completion the pacification of the district. In Salad's stead he had installed as chief of the Abassis—a much-depleted tribe, for the majority of the able-bodied had fled from Kuka, doubtless to follow the fortunes of their ill-fated chief—an elderly native whose right of succession had been previously overlooked in favour of Salad, and who, as a consequence, had been forced to take refuge with a neighbouring tribe. This chief, Toro, amply justified the major's action by the whole-hearted manner in which he encouraged recruiting, and it was mainly due to his efforts that, before we had been at Kuka one month, our numbers had swelled to the formidable figure of two thousand able-bodied combatants.

Blank surprise was written on the major's face as Captain Tomson approached him, which was immediately changed to a look of grim satisfaction when he realised the reason of our arrival. With a few curt words the preparations for departure were cancelled, and after a critical inspection of the reinforcements, quarters were assigned to us, and we settled down to the routine of an armed camp.

In that month which had so satisfactory

a result in the swelling of our numbers, the work entailed in inculcating a sense of discipline alone was no light task, and when added to this came the matter of educating the men into the use of the rifle and bayonet, it can well be realised how heavy were the duties thrust upon those responsible for the instruction. And yet so amenable were these raw natives that, at the end of that month, though in drill they would not have satisfied the critical eye of a line sergeant, they had been shaped for the purpose of bush warfare into a most workmanlike contingent.

So satisfied was Major Currie with the rapid progress made that he resolved to expedite the plans which he had formed for his incursion into the enemy's territory.

This was the state of affairs which I discovered on my return from a scouting expedition, upon which I had been engaged for nearly three weeks, during which period I had been able to glean much valuable information as to the disposition of the enemy troops across the border. Through Nikko's invaluable aid I learned that the tribes in this northernmost part of German West Africa were somewhat lukewarm in their sympathy for the cause of their German masters, and, wherever possible, had hidden themselves from conscription.

Those who had been forced to serve, I gathered, were in an attitude which can only be described as sitting on the fence, and at the first sign of matters going awry for their taskmasters, would, I was confident, throw in their lot with us at the most favourable opportunity. Thus, against a foe which numbered so many half-hearted adherents, the opposition which we were likely to meet with did not seem

to me to promise as very formidable, at any rate until we should penetrate farther into the territory towards Duala.

Apparently Salad was in command of a considerable body of native troops, and held the line between Adamawa and Duala; consequently, before we could join up with our troops operating from the south in the Kamerun district, a collision with this force shortly after we crossed the border was imminent. All this I related to Major Currie at a pow-wow held on the eve of departure, and the news that, save for a few non-commissioned officers, the force about to be opposed was entirely composed of natives, caused him considerable satisfaction.

Besides my brothers Ted and Tom, both Jim Fellows and Hugh Martyn were of our party, and all four having experienced the toils and troubles of their School Corps, the responsibility of a company had been thrust upon them. Neither our physical nor our spiritual welfare was in strange hands, for combining the duties of Chaplain and Medical Officer was no less a personage than our old tutor, "Stubby," or, to give him his title in full, Rev. Septimus Stubbs. Destined for the life of a missionary, he had contrived in his 'varsity days to add the degree of M.B. to that of D.D.

At the first signs of dawn next morning began our march towards the border, which, unless anything unforeseen should occur, we expected to cross before the close of the third day. Ted was in command of the advance guard, and it was in his company that those first three days were spent, which passed uneventfully. It was not until we had penetrated well into the interior, and had been a fortnight on the trek, that we gained any

inkling as to the whereabouts of the enemy.

The country through which we had passed showed on every side evidence of their late presence, but, though we searched the deserted kraals on the route, no vestige of a living native could we find. Dead, there were many, the majority of whom appeared to have met their end by means of wounds in the back, and these, it seemed to me, must have paid the penalty of desertion.

Nikko and I had pushed on some miles in advance through the dense forest, in which we had on several occasions throughout the day lost our bearings, only to discover again the small beaten track by a mere fluke, and the last of these mishaps, occurring when we were on our way back to camp, caused so much delay that by the time we had regained the track twilight had begun to set in. Now, as we had experienced so much difficulty in keeping the path in the daytime, it did not take me long to decide which was the better course to pursue—to endeavour to return or to stand fast?

As the day had been fruitless of result as regards information, I resolved to let well alone and stay where we were. We were rather in a quandary as to how the night should be spent, for, if we resorted to the safest way of keeping prowling beasts at a respectable distance, namely, the lighting of a bonfire, we might expose ourselves to the danger of capture by the enemy, who, for aught we knew to the contrary, might be hovering around the vicinity.

However, we eventually solved the difficulty by selecting as our roosting-place the friendly boughs of a huge tree, which,

by the stout aid of Nikko, I managed to swarm up. But no sooner had I settled down in some resemblance of comfort, when through the gaps in the long avenue of trees the glint of a blaze met my eyes some distance in front of us, and then, as the night-breeze was blowing in our faces, the odour of cooking was wafted in our direction.

Nikko was at once all eagerness to set out alone to investigate the strength of the party evidently now in the enjoyment of their evening meal, but, as it would be imperative for us to retreat immediately, despite the darkness and consequent risk of losing our way if the fire was caused by Salad's outpost, I resolved to accompany him. Accordingly we crept stealthily along the beaten track, taking the utmost precaution, lest the snapping of a dry twig, or the rustling of some bush as we brushed by, should betray our presence, and finally on hands and knees we crawled through a patch of long grass, from the other side of which we saw the smoke rising heavenwards.

Arriving at the extremity of this grass plot, which fringed the clearing whence the fire was sparkling brightly, I peered through to see busily engaged in the cooking of a bird one solitary native. And, as I looked more closely, I beheld a sight which affected me almost to the point of nausea. The whole of his back was a mass of coagulated blood, and here and there could be seen strips of flesh hanging limply downwards. I shuddered as I visioned the terrible punishment which this poor beggar must have undergone, and, fearing that at the first sight of us he might bolt into the bush, thus compelling us to a game of hide-and-seek, for

which at that hour and in such an eerie spot I had small stomach, I bade Nikko crawl round the other side in order to cut him off if my conjecture should prove correct.

My foresight met with a gratifying result, for, as I suddenly emerged from cover, thus revealing my presence, the poor beggar, with an agonised look in his eyes, bolted straight into the arms of Nikko, who securely held him. And then, before ever I commenced to question him as to the plight we had found him in, I heard Nikko shout "Gaklas," and the next moment our prisoner and my worthy factotum were indulging in transports of most extravagant delight.

Not until that least demonstrative of niggers, Nikko, had exhausted the pleasure which the meeting had afforded him, was I given an inkling as to how matters stood. It appeared that Gaklas it was who had saved Nikko from being dished up as a savoury morsel in the sacrificial cooking-pot of the Abassis, on the occasion of the feast given in celebration of the marriage of Salad's mother to a white man. News had reached Gaklas of the witch doctor's designs, and he had carried the information to Nikko, who had straightaway shaken the dust of Abassi from his feet, seeking security as far distant as Asaba.

As to the narrow escape which Nikko had experienced, I had previous knowledge, but as to who that benefactor was who had contrived to secure it, I was, until this moment, ignorant. That the two should meet again under such strange circumstances seemed to me to be a strange working of fate, from which much good might arise. It was obvious to me that the sorry condition of Gaklas's back



The poor beggar bolted straight into the arms of Nikko.

was the handiwork of some brutal German non-commissioned officer, for talk had reached us before the outbreak of hostilities as to the peculiar methods employed by them in their efforts towards the civilisation of the natives under their rule.

The tale which Nikko extracted from his erstwhile companion in arms was but another proof of the savage brutality of the race which has ever proved such signal failures at colonisation. The accidental overturning of a cooking-pot, in which simmered the evening meal of one of the "unter-offiziers," had been the reason for the drastic punishment meted out to Gaklas, who apparently upon losing consciousness, had been left for dead, for on recovering his senses he opened his eyes to see a deserted camp. That camp was barely a mile away, and according to the

calculation of Gaklas, had been evacuated for over two days.

It was here that Salad had joined up with the Germans, and though I gathered that his force was vastly superior to the German, as to the strength of the whole party I failed to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion owing to the limited quality of Gaklas's arithmetic. But this I did learn, that of machine-guns they had many, and altogether they appeared to be well equipped. According to Gaklas, their objective was Soba, where they would be heavily reinforced by the Adamawese, a hill country tribe of a great notoriety as warriors.

Leaving Nikko with Gaklas, to be picked up by us in our advance, I returned to camp next morning, to retail the information which had been obtained in so strange

a fashion. My absence all night had caused some uneasiness, and a search party was on the point of departure when I arrived to save them a fruitless journey. The news which I brought with me had the effect of bringing about a slight alteration of plans, for our original intention had been to make straight for Ngaundere, where we hoped to get in touch with our allies from French Ubangi, and to avoid Soba by a wide detour. We had nothing to gain by acting precipitately, rather was it to the contrary; for, with the coast blockaded by our gunboats, there was no outlet by which the enemy could escape. Hedged in by France on the east, ourselves on the north, France and Belgium on the south, it was merely a matter of time before the enemy would be forced to strike their flag.

A waiting policy was the game to play, and this course Major Currie intended to pursue. In accordance with this plan, we made our way slowly through forests and swamps, where it was conceivable no white man's foot had trod before, stopping every now and then to replenish our larder from the game which abounded on every side.

CHAPTER II

IF our journey towards Soba had been uneventful, the month's halt which we made in front of that native township was not allowed to pass without bringing strongly home to us that, though apparently disinclined to risk the clash of open warfare, the enemy were not content to browse idly by the way without making some effort to disturb our equanimity. It was upon

my small staff that the burden of responsibility fell during the first few days of our halt, and, though what intelligence we could glean had perforce to be gained from a distance, on account of the extreme vigilance of the enemy's outposts, we were successful at any rate in discovering that the numbers opposing us, though superior, were not of so overwhelming a character as to forbid attack, when and where we should choose to make it.

With Nikko in close attendance, I was returning to camp in the early morning, having been engaged all night in an unsuccessful attempt to penetrate into the enemy's lines, when, shortly after we had passed our own outposts, a singular spectacle met my view. Coming down the hastily made clearing of the forest, some hundred yards in front of me, stalked six natives, bearing on their shoulders some great object which, at the distance I then was, it was impossible to distinguish clearly.

To me at first it looked for all the world like a funeral procession, and the slow, deliberate steps of the oncoming party did but heighten the impression. But that impression did not last long, for reason told me that if any of the natives had shuffled off this mortal coil during my absence, the spot for his interment would not be chosen so far away from the camp. Nikko first spotted what the object was which had so puzzled me. An alligator—and a dead one at that, for, as the party closely approached, we distinguished its lifeless appearance.

All this time we had been hidden from view in the dense scrub, but as the curious burden and its bearers hove alongside we emerged from our hiding-place. Our sudden

appearance so startled the bearers that, becoming unbalanced, the heavy carcass slipped from their shoulders, and fell with a splosh to the ground.

If it had not been for the expression of fear on their faces—real fear, hardly to be reconciled with mere jumpiness only natural after a sudden surprise—I do not think that beyond satisfying my curiosity as to what they purposed doing with the carcass, I should have bothered my head any more about the matter. I felt much more inclined for the comforts of my tent, than the delay of interrogating stupid natives engaged upon so aimless a mission as the carrying of an alligator's carcass into the depths of the forest.

However, premonition, call it what you will, caused me to see in this apparently harmless occupation a mystery, and urged me to probe its depths. I saw at once that the party was composed entirely of Abassis, of which tribe over one hundred had voluntarily enlisted with us, and though, thanks to Nikko, I had become fairly fluent in their dialect, I left the questioning to my henchman.

The reason of their enterprise was a very simple one. As worshippers of their alligator god, Thako, they were desirous of returning the carcass which they had found the previous day to the stream which lay some distance beyond our outposts. That they were prepared to run the risk of discovery by the enemy in order to propitiate their god seemed to me an ample proof of their earnestness, and the explanation effectually lulled my suspicions. Nikko, I could see, was quite satisfied, and accordingly motioning to them to continue their task, I, out of curiosity to see in what fashion they would set about the hoisting

of the loathsome carcass to their shoulders, watched with close interest.

But, as the Abassis prepared themselves for the task, and before ever a hand was laid upon their object, there flashed across my astonished eyes an almost imperceptible movement in the belly of the abominable reptile. No sign of life was there in the ugly head and ferocious jaws (opened wide by the insertion of a stick), but as I gazed more closely, the brute's flank was repeatedly distended, as if pressure was being expended by some unknown force inside the carcass.

Calling Nikko hurriedly to my side, I directed his attention to the disturbance which had so weirdly manifested itself within the carcass, and asked him if he could account for the phenomenon. In a flash came the answer, "Something alive inside, master; let me rip him up and see," and following his words with action, with knife in hand he made towards the carcass already poised on the bearers' shoulders.

Though not able to follow the trend of our conversation, which had been conducted in English, an inkling as to our purpose was provided the Abassis by reason of Nikko's determined attitude with the unsheathed weapon in his hand. Uneasiness was at once written on their countenances, and then, as Nikko in his native tongue announced to them his purpose, before ever I could detach revolver from hip-pocket, the carcass was dashed to the ground, and through the dense scrub fled the Abassis.

The unceremonious fashion with which the object upon which they had ostensibly lavished so much care was treated had, as its result, the effect of depositing the

reptile on its back, and there it lay in all its ugliness amidst the tall grass by the side of the beaten path. Brushing the grass aside to afford more open space, Nikko knelt preparatory to ripping open the belly of the beast, but, just as he was about to plunge his knife into the carcass, he paused and spluttered out in a tone of excitement, "Him been split before, master; see 'em stitches."

Looking more closely I saw from throat to tail one long slit, which had been so skilfully and stoutly sewn together as almost to defy detection. Nikko applied himself to his task of detaching the stitches, and commencing in the middle he had but separated a few when, to our horrified amazement, from the small aperture produced a khaki-clad knee protruded. To complete the task was the work of an instant, and casting his knife to the ground Nikko pulled out of its horrible place of concealment the bound figure of a khaki-clad soldier, and an officer at that.

Clothes covered all over with indescribable slime, hair matted and face bespattered with blood, ankles firmly tied with native cord, arms bound behind back, be-gagged mouth, verily did the unfortunate man present a sorry spectacle. That life could be present within that tortured frame I scarcely dared to hope, and yet, as I removed the gag from the swollen lips, the faintest of breaths passed across my knuckles. Nikko quickly releasing the victim from his bonds, I seized both arms in the hope that by the method usually adopted for the saving of half-drowned persons I might be able to force air through the lungs, and as I commenced my task I looked intently into my unfortunate patient's face.

Our water-bottles had run dry, otherwise I should have before this dowsed him copiously with the precious fluid, and washed away the blood which had so disguised his features, thus making recognition possible, but since the case was so urgent, I had felt that identification might well wait. I had not looked more than a second when I almost dropped in horrified amazement. The victim whose arms now rested in my hands was none other than Ted.

An involuntary cry left my lips, as with frenzied haste I set about my task of resuscitation. I prayed at every moment that succour had not arrived too late, and the perspiration dripped from me at the dreadful thought. That somehow or other Salad was responsible for Ted's terrible plight I was as certain as if I had been a very witness of the abduction. The diabolical ingenuity of the scheme to carry off Ted alive under the very eyes of our camp revealed a master-mind, and since the Germans could have no especial object in singling out Ted for capture there remained only the arch-plotter—Salad.

Fully twenty minutes went by of anxious ceaseless movements before any encouragement whatever came to hearten our efforts, but, after the first flickering moments of returning animation, our efforts were rewarded, and Ted opened his eyes. A wave of thankfulness ran through me as I glimpsed a look of recognition, and though Ted relapsed into unconsciousness, much of my dreadful uneasiness had passed away. We should, I knew, not have to wait long before assistance was at hand, for the relieving of the outposts was about due, and as both relievers and relieved would pass our way, we would commandeer water from the former, which was so greatly

needed, and press the latter into service as bearers for the return to camp.

It was, indeed, but a few minutes before that which I had foreseen came to pass, and, under the refreshing influence of the contents of the water-bottles, consciousness returned once more to Ted. Willing hands improvised a stretcher, and upon this we

the reason for the slight disturbance, he had been struck on the head with some heavy instrument. After that he remembered no more until the moment when, feeling suffocated, he had fought with body and knees to free himself from his horrible prison. After a sudden collision all had become a blank again, until he had opened



Our efforts were rewarded, and Ted opened his eyes.

conveyed Ted back to camp, where, under the skilful hands of Stubby, he had sufficiently recovered the next day to relate the circumstances which led to the awful predicament which had befallen him.

This was told in a very few words, for he had been awakened by a noise in his tent, and, upon raising himself to find out

his eyes to see Nikko and me leaning over him.

The collision was, of course, the casting of the carcass from his captors' shoulders when they realised the failure of their plans, and it seemed to me in very truth an act of Providence, that Ted should have sufficiently recovered his senses as to

struggle just at the crucial moment of our meeting with the party. I shudder to this day to think how miraculous a deliverance was his, for if consciousness had been delayed but a few minutes, he must have been condemned to a frightful death at the hands of Salad.

Beyond the blow on the head Ted had suffered no other injury, and a day or two in bed was all that was needed to set him on his legs again. Naturally, we searched high and low for the treacherous Abassis, but despite the vigilance of Nikko no success attended our efforts, and we had perforce to let the matter rest. My insistence that Salad was the originator of the plot was received incredulously by Ted, who scoffed at the idea of that individual being able to get into communication with any one in our camp, but, all the same, so convinced was I of its correctness that I had small hesitation in putting the whole facts of the feud between Ted and Salad before Major Currie.

He, to my great satisfaction, inclined to my way of thinking, and as the outrage on Ted, who was immensely popular with the natives, had brought the remaining Abassis into disfavour with the other tribes, he decided to dispense with the Abassis' services when the moment for the advance arrived. In this I think he was wise, for already Nikko had been busily providing from their ranks several interesting cases for Stubby's immediate attention.

During Ted's convalescence I had made several reconnaissances of the enemy's position, and on one of these had noticed considerable activity taking place to the south of Soba, which pointed—so it seemed to me—to the arrival of reinforcements. As it was imperative that this fresh accession

of strength should be verified, I determined on the first occasion of a moonless night to go farther afield, and endeavour to enter the enemy's lines in that direction.

I discussed my plans with Major Currie in Stubby's tent over a cup of tea, and these meeting with approval, I waited anxiously for the favourable circumstances of a dark night. For a week the moon persisted in baffling my opportunity, but at last came a night which for its pitch darkness I could not have bettered even if I, a poor mortal, had had the ordering of it. So with Nikko as my sole companion, I crept out of the camp, and taking a course east of Soba, which I intended to pursue as far as I thought advisable before making my way southwards, my journey of investigation began.

The country over which we had to pass when the outskirts of the front were reached inclined favourably to the task we had in hand. Though Soba on the west was faced by a large tract of swampy country, on the east the land was hilly, with scrubby bushes and tangled growth, interspersed with patches of clearing over which rude attempts at agriculture had at one time prevailed. What the country was to the south was a sealed book to me, and I devoutly prayed that the conditions prevailing on the west might be spared me.

The point at which I aimed before diverging southwards was about two miles distant from our camp, and this we reached without having once noted the presence of outposts. Nor did we, until we came to within a few hundred yards of Soba itself, after a slow and difficult passage through thick undergrowth which repeatedly barred our way. Our progress had been anything but noiseless; indeed, so difficult

had it been to proceed silently, that I had more than once debated in my mind the abandonment of the expedition.

But this very difficulty of the rough nature of the country through which we were forcing our way caused me to decide to carry on, for it occurred to me that the reason of the absence of outposts thus far might be due to this very fact. Deeming passage through the dense undergrowth and scrub impossible at night-time, the enemy had withdrawn the men closer home. If such had not been the case we must have been discovered scores of times, for not even the stoical Nikko could always restrain the grunt of painful surprise whenever an extra long spike of a Brikkus bush penetrated some portion of his anatomy.

For myself, when we emerged into more or less clear country, I gave a sigh of relief, for I felt that there could be few parts of my body which had escaped being pierced. The prospect of returning by the same route was distinctly unpleasant.

As soon as we had sufficiently recovered our breath, for the effort required to frequently burst one's way through thick bush necessitated no slight exertion, on hands and knees we crawled stealthily through the tall grass towards the flickering light of camp fires. Now and then we caught a glimpse against the background of flame of patrolling figures, and as we approached nearer, the figures of the sentries could be clearly distinguished.

The distance between the posts, as far as I could make out, was about fifty paces, which seemed little enough for our chances of slipping through unobserved. However, we decided to chance our fate, and accordingly crept towards the likeliest spot,

which would afford cover in case our plans went awry. The place which we headed for was at the end of a clearing fringed with tall bushes of a man's height, and arriving there we approached to within a few yards of the ambling figure of the sentry in front of us.

Awaiting the moment when he should have completed half of his imposed journey, we speedily crawled through some twenty paces, and concealing ourselves behind a bush, lay with bated breath awaiting the return of the sentry to his starting-off place. When he had returned and again set off on his round, we noiselessly proceeded on our way towards a cluster of tents which showed up against the brilliant blaze of a fire, in what I imagined to be the usual square of a native township.

All the tents were in darkness save one, and to that one we cautiously headed. And as we more nearly approached the canvas structure, there came to my ears the sound of half-whispered utterances. In so low a tone was the conversation carried on that, though I placed my ear to the tent itself, I could distinguish nothing, but the guttural sound proceeding from within told me I had hit upon a German temporary domicile.

I searched around cautiously in the hope of finding some hole in the structure which would serve the purpose both of hearing and of seeing, but, though I traversed the whole circle around, not a sign of any defection of the kind could I discover.

However, not to be defeated in my purpose, I produced my knife and with it proceeded to slit a hole in the fabric. Fortunately the canvas was dry, which allowed the keen blade a noiseless passage, and when I had satisfied myself as to the

length of the slit requisite to the provision of a good peephole, I prised open the aperture slightly with my fingers and applied an eye to the spot.

The tent, though not a particularly large one, was capable of accommodating as a sleeping compartment three persons, which, as a matter of fact, was the number of camp beds which I saw therein, but at this moment, on packing-cases, disused biscuit tins, and the beds themselves, thrice that number were seated. The tent reeked of the fumes of tobacco and lamp oil, and the light shed by the small lamp affixed to the centre pole of the tent was scarcely strong enough to distinguish the faces of all its occupants.

It needed but a cursory glance to assure me that this assembly was not a mere meeting for convivial purposes, but was designed for a more serious purpose. Of the gathering, two alone were natives, and these I scanned searchingly, for on first catching sight of them I at once jumped to the conclusion that one of them must be Salad himself. But I was wrong in this, as I saw presently when they arose from their seats and showed themselves to be both well over six feet and handsomely proportioned at that. And this Salad never was.

I had resigned myself to what seemed the certain fact of my erstwhile schoolfellow being absent from this company, when in answer to some query from the speaker who had been addressing the gathering, there arose from a corner of the tent a short squat figure clad in the uniform of a German officer. A rapid glance at his sleeve showed him to be of the rank of captain, another at his face revealed to me that he whom I had thought absent

was there standing before me. From the looks which passed over the faces of his fellow companions, and the deference paid to his opening remarks, he was evidently viewed as a person of no small importance in the eyes of the Germans.

All this while I had contented myself with the use of eyes alone, for, though I had been able to catch a word or two which had fallen from the lips of the previous speaker, a colonel of the usual massive Teutonic build, I had failed to learn anything beyond the fact that a move from Soba was near at hand, but when Salad began to speak I withdrew my eye, and substituting my ear, eagerly listened.

Though I say it myself in all modesty, our Intelligence Department, though having no great call previous to this expedition, had met all requirements with a nicety sufficient to earn the commendations on several occasions of Major Currie and the officers comprising his staff, so that I, being in command, rather prided myself on its sterling efficiency. But, as I listened to Salad coolly referring to the strength of our resources with an exactitude almost uncanny in its thoroughness, I began to lose conceit of my own performances.

He related in a calm, even voice how on his last visit to our camp he had completed arrangements for the abduction of an enemy officer, from whom he had experienced great hopes of being able to extract much valuable information. But this plan, he added, in a tone in which regret was mingled with hate, had unfortunately failed at the last moment; however, his journey had not been altogether fruitless, since he had learned of the contemplated advance of the English, which was due for



He whom I thought absent was there standing before me

he twenty-third of the month, now but four days hence.

He paused a few brief moments, and I had thought his remarks had come to an end, but presently he resumed, to strike a chord which sent a chill right through me. The outposts far afield had been removed that night, save for one or two concealed in the topmost branches of trees, who could flash their signals in case of the approach of any large body of men, and this had been done with the hope of encouraging the enterprise of their enemy's Intelligence Department. At dawn a cordon was to be drawn around the camp and vigilant search made in the hope that a covey or two might be flushed from the surrounding bush. Instead of a stuffy, tobacco-reeking tent in the wilds of German West Africa, by the way Salad was talking, one might have imagined oneself transported to the inside of an English country-house in September, with one's host arranging plans for the morrow's sport of his guests.

Now that the Jugras had joined them he suggested that a move should be made southwards towards Ngaundere at once, and that after poisoning the wells, Soba should be given up to the flames. I could see that Salad's suggestions met with approval by the look of satisfaction on the faces of the company present, and when he sat down the commandant commented favourably on the plan, furthermore announcing that the evacuation of Soba would take place two days hence.

Though the meeting showed no signs of breaking up, I had heard sufficient for my purpose. I decided that, as I had no wish to provide Salad and his beaters with the sport of chevying Nikko and myself through the dense prickly scrub, through which we

had already travelled, it behoved us to lose no time in removing ourselves from the immediate neighbourhood. We had I knew, a full hour before Salad's plan of placing a cordon around the district would commence, and I hoped that by that time we should be clear of the thickest and by far the most painful portion of our journey. I'm afraid at the moment I had rather overlooked the fact that, before issuing into the open country, there was yet an important obstacle to overcome, namely, the outwitting of sentries once again.

Possibly the comparative ease with which we had accomplished our entry into Soba deluded me into thinking that in our departure the same absence of difficulty would be experienced. Not that success had lulled me into a sense of security, for, if the truth were told, I felt as if I were standing on the very edge of a precipice, where the slightest touch would send me hurtling to destruction. No; it wasn't that; rather was it in the supreme confidence which I had in my companion.

If it came to a question of the noiseless removal of a sentry from our path, I knew that Nikko could be relied upon with complete satisfaction. He had supplied me with evidence of his consummate ability in this direction on more than one occasion. Accordingly, as we reached the spot which had marked our entrance into Soba, I felt no qualms at any rate as to our exit, but our crawl had scarcely commenced before the sound of low whispers brought us promptly to a halt.

Presently the whispering became louder, enabling us to catch here and there a short sentence sufficient to explain the presence of the additional strength in this quarter. At first I had thought it was

merely the relief of sentries, and that but a few minutes would delay us in our glide through the lines. Judge, then, of my consternation when I gathered that the sentry posts in the near neighbourhood of Soba had already been strengthened. At first I was inclined to make a dash for it, and trust to the darkness for our chance of gaining the cover of the bush, but on second thoughts this seemed to me to be too risky, on account of the difficulty in concealing our presence when we had gained the sanctuary of the thick scrub.

With the knowledge of Salad's precautions which would be put into practice at the break of dawn, now so perilously near, we could not afford to remain stationary, and yet the slightest movement through the tanglewood must betray our whereabouts. That Soba would be just as vigilantly guarded at the northern entrance was obvious, yet all the same I determined to assure myself on that point, despite the added danger of having to traverse the whole length of the place.

With this object in view I acquainted Nikko of my purpose, and, skirting the tents, taking advantage of every bit of cover which offered itself, we finally found ourselves again outside the boundary of the town, listening to the soft tread of the sentries as their feet rustled through the dry grass.

As I had imagined, the same conditions prevailed as at the southern entrance, and as the impossibility of getting through that night was driven forcibly home to me, since our situation was now desperate in the extreme, I resolved to adopt the bold plan of remaining concealed in Soba itself.

This intention I conveyed to Nikko, who responded with a grunt of satisfaction,

and together we retreated to the confines of the camp in our search for a feasible hiding-place. I had in my mind for this purpose the veranda of a bungalow, for I knew from my own at Asaba that there was sufficient space underneath to contain any one in a recumbent position. The prising open of the board at one end was the only thing necessary for entrance, and I hoped to come across one which from lack of repair, for wood rots easily in the West African climate, might be manipulated by hand with ease.

But, alas for this plan, not a bungalow could we discern, for the wooden structures, which on our first passage through the town had created this inspiration of concealment, were just the ordinary huts of level flooring.

Chance solved the problem of a hiding-place. We were still in the neighbourhood of the northern entrance, groping our way from hut to hut, when a slight disturbance arising from within one of them caused us to retreat hastily to the back of them, and as we sought to proceed farther from the vicinity we found our way suddenly barred by rows of firewood, which, with their passion for orderliness, the Germans had evidently caused to be stacked there.

There were five rows piled neatly to a height of some six feet, and as far as I could judge, about double that in breadth, with just room for a man to pass between.

I was at some pains to discover these details, for here it was that I had instantaneously resolved to find a place of concealment. After as careful an examination as time and place allowed, I picked upon the middle pile as being the best for our purpose, by reason of its being composed mainly of brushwood, thus not only making

accessibility easier, but promising a rather more comfortable resting-place than the heavy logs which marked the other rows.

There was also another reason which helped me in my selection, for I reasoned that as these piles of wood were destined for use and not ornament, the rows at the end would be more likely to receive the attention of those in search of firewood than would this middle one. Furthermore, that as Soba would be deserted in forty-eight hours, whether the collection of the wood for firing purposes commenced either at the top or bottom of the row, it would take more than that space of time before recourse had to be made to the one in which we were about to take up our abode.

Dawn had begun to break before Nikko and I had squirmed our way into the pile, and had made ourselves as comfortable as circumstances would allow, by easing the weight upon us by means of stout stakes. We contrived to manufacture peepholes, so that I had an unobstructed view of the approach to the southern, and Nikko to the northern, entrance of the township.

We had completed our arrangements none too soon, for shortly the camp was astir and preparations were being made for an early meal. A low whisper from Nikko, informing me of the approach of some natives in his direction, set my nerves atingle, and, as their voices gradually grew nearer, I could not restrain my thoughts from the fear of imminent discovery.

The object of their near presence was soon made plain by the noise of huddling logs in the rows above us, which, ceasing after a time, led us to believe that we had seen the last of them for that morning. But such was not the case entirely, for, though four of the party of five departed

with their loads, the fifth proceeded down the rows and, halting in front of our pile, commenced to detach the neatly-bound bundles of brushwood from its summit.

One—two—three—four—I counted the bundles which he deposited on the ground, with dreadful anxiety; five—six—would he never stop?—seven—eight—how many more would the removal suffice to expose us to his gaze?—nine—ten—was the whole pile to be demolished that very morning on account of the coming departure?

The sweat poured from me in profusion as these thoughts ran rapidly through my mind. Was this to be the end of everything? To be caught like rats in a trap! Well, at any rate, like rats at bay we could show that we had teeth, and I fingered my Colt, resolved to sell my life dearly. Never was I so thankful when at ten the tally ceased, and the Banchi—for that he was of that tribe his headgear showed—hoisting a couple of the bundles to his capacious shoulders, took his departure.

As the day progressed the burning rays of the sun beat down upon our hiding-place with fierce intensity, until it seemed that flesh and blood could not long withstand the fiery ordeal. Though lips became parched in the suffocating atmosphere, we dared not indulge in too frequent libations from our water-bottles, which, fortunately, we had not used since setting out on our venture. Emergency rations which we had also with us would stave off the pangs of hunger, if the plans which we had overheard suffered no disarrangement, and that forty-eight hours was really to be the limit of our confinement.

I had determined to run no further risks of discovery, not even to replenish our water-bottles from the wells at the southern

entrance to the township after nightfall, unless it became absolutely imperative to do so. I did not shut my eyes to the certitude of suffering great hardships by such restraint; all the same, until the limit of endurance was reached, neither Nikko nor myself should leave the spot.

The sense of personal danger dwindled before the thought of the dreadful catastrophe which would occur if our forces should reach the wells without receiving a warning of the enemy's fiendish act. I knew, after leaving camp, what Major Currie's intentions were regarding the advance upon Soba, and that, if adhered to, he would arrive twenty-four hours after the enemy had disappeared, and I intended, when that much-to-be-desired event came round, to slip out and carry the warning to him.

Though there were many moments throughout that day when it seemed impossible that we could last out the interminable hours before sundown would bring us precious relief, stick it we did, though darkness found us in a very exhausted condition. Sleep, however, came to bring with it the blessed unconsciousness of our sufferings, and we awoke to find the camp bustling with preparations for the trek southwards.

I had not watched these preparations long before the hastiness and lack of orderliness in their movements struck me as strangely foreign to the usual methods of German efficiency. In the neighbourhood around us, indeed, they savoured of panic, and set me wondering as to the cause. The possibility of Major Currie having so altered his plans as to speed forward his advance by twenty-four hours at once flashed across my mind.

The conjecture had scarcely been conceived a second or two, before confirmation arrived through the medium of Nikko, who had managed to catch here and there a few words uttered by those who, from time to time, passed our place of concealment. Scouts had come in with the information that our troops were already within a few hours' march of Soba, hence the frenzied haste for its evacuation.

Though the news brought to me pleasant thoughts of a speedy relief from intolerable confinement, it also created within me a feeling of perplexity, for between the advancing troops and Soba lay the poisoned wells. For aught I knew the Germans might see fit to leave behind them a force of some strength to fight a rearguard action, in order to delay the advance of our troops, in which case the chances of either Nikko or myself being able to deliver the warning to Major Currie became hopeless.

I cudgelled my brains for some scheme which might best meet this emergency, but none came to me which promised any measure of success, and accordingly I was left with the choice of remaining where I was during hostilities, or of making an attempt to break through the enemy's ranks in broad daylight. That the Germans would endeavour to delay the advance of our men seemed to me a foregone conclusion, when, in the midst of my troublesome cogitations, I saw advancing up the one long street of Soba a group of officers, some of whom, when they more closely approached, I had no difficulty in recognising as being among those whom I had seen overnight in the tent.

The unwieldy form of the commandant towered above the others, and, as he

marched with quick, nervous strides, he gesticulated with his hands, as if to impress his remarks more forcibly on the sturdy, squat figure of the officer closely attending him. It needed no lengthy glance of mine to inform me who the latter was, for, even had I been unable to recognise his features, those short lolling strides which I had

effect which the recently arrived report had produced upon them, from the commandant down to the most junior officer of his staff, for that was written clear upon the faces of all save Salad. No trace of agitation could be discerned on that swarthy, unemotional countenance, as he listened to the rapid outpourings of the



They halted right in front of the pile of brushwood.

so often remarked upon in my Syston schooldays would have betrayed Salad at every step. He was evidently in high favour with the commandant, for that individual continued unceasingly to converse with him, to the exclusion of the rest of his staff.

There was no gainsaying the perturbing

German leader. Now and then, when the stream of words which gushed from the latter's lips momentarily ceased, Salad interpolated a few remarks of his own, which were listened to with evident satisfaction, judging from the pleased looks which passed across the faces of his companions.

Strain my ears ever so hard, I could catch no syllable of the conversation, but, as our hiding-place lay immediately in their pathway, if, as I hastily surmised, they were proceeding to the northern confines of the camp to select the most advantageous position for resisting the threatened attack, then was there some hope of picking up fragments which might lead to an inkling of their plans as they passed by. And thus did it come to pass in a manner which far exceeded my expectations, for, having arrived at the stacks of wood, they halted right in front of the pile of brushwood in which lay Nikko and myself.

So near were they that I could have touched either the commandant or Salad, who stood a little apart from the rest, and my ears readily devoured the gist of their earnest discussion. The commandant was strongly in favour of checking Major Currie's advance, an action which Salad was endeavouring earnestly to dissuade him from taking.

A far more favourable position for opposing the advance lay in the hilly country some twenty miles to the south of Soba, if, pointed out Salad, it became necessary at all to clash with the enemy. Personally he was of the opinion that it was not, and he strongly urged upon the commandant to adhere to the original plan of delaying contact until the Kamerun country was reached. He agreed that it was essential that the enemy should be hindered, and the advance made more difficult, and this, he maintained, could be accomplished without any casualties to themselves.

Since Soba was to be evacuated, it would be as well to set fire to the town and the

near neighbourhood, which would necessarily bring the enemy to a halt. Furthermore, the heat aroused by the conflagration might result in more frequent recourse to the wells, and thus cause a certain depletion of the enemy forces.

The cold-blooded manner in which Salad unfolded his fiendish alternative plan roused within me a burning desire to there and then discharge the revolver which I was nervously fingering, and summarily put an end to his dastardly career. Prudence, however, held me back, and I listened to the completion of Salad's harangue.

As might naturally be surmised, the spot from which the conflagration would commence was amongst the very piles of store-wood in which we were hidden, for, being so near the thatched huts of the native quarters, apart from the material for kindling the bonfire being so ready to hand, the quarter being so thickly clustered gave certain promise of an instant blaze. This Salad was not slow to insist upon, but that nothing should be left to chance he suggested that, since speed was of urgent necessity, carboys of methylated spirits should be lavishly disposed upon both the piles of wood and the huts.

The plan, meeting with the entire satisfaction of the commandant, fatigue parties were mustered, and soon there dripped through the loosely piled twigs of driftwood upon Nikko and myself streams of the inflammable spirit. The last carboy emptied, the commandant and his staff departed, leaving behind them a corporal and two files of native troops with instructions to fire the piles in two hours' time. The horrible situation in which we were now placed was such as would have struck fear into the stoutest of hearts, and at the

thought of the dreadful death in store for us, for some moments I feared my brain would go under the strain.

Then, as the thought of the two-hours' reprieve simmered through, my mind became calmer, and contemplating with the buoyancy of youth on the old adage, "while there's life there's hope," I began to view the outlook in less hopeless fashion. One thing at least I was determined upon, the pile in which we were should be no funeral pyre for us, for if the worst came to the worst, then it should be in the open that our end should be met. That which I had so eagerly looked for a few minutes before was the very thing I now dreaded, namely, the arrival of Major Currie with his force. At the first report from the outposts of the near neighbourhood of our men, I readily realised that the torch would at once be applied and Soba given to the flames.

Time flew all too quickly, and, as my watch pointed to the near approach of the dreaded hour, I made Nikko acquainted with my intention of making a sudden dash. Of the party of five entrusted with the duty of incendiarism, two only remained within our vision; the other three, from the sound of their voices, were in the huts behind us. With but a minute to go, I saw the German corporal with a bundle of tow in his hand advance towards us in leisurely fashion, and, nudging Nikko to prepare for the order to fire, I covered with my revolver the bulky form of the Bosche.

Shouting to the men to the rear of us, he had proceeded to within ten paces of the piles, when, as he extracted a box of matches from the pouch of his belt, he paused to turn his head in the direction of the lower end of the town. I craned my

neck to seek for a cause of this hesitation, and in the dim distance caught sight of a figure scurrying towards us with incredible speed. As he became more readily distinguishable, I saw that he carried a signalling flag in his right hand, which, when some fifty yards off, he frantically waved.

With finger on trigger, and my heart thumping like the piston-rod of an engine, I glued my eyes on the signaller. I blessed the lucky star which had prevailed upon me to undergo a course of signalling in my Syston schooldays, otherwise I should not have refrained from firing at this moment when the enemy's attention was so distracted. Even then, if the rest of the party had formed up in front of us, offering a fair target, having regard to the state of anxiety in which I then was, I must have fired.

Quickly the message waved through the air—"No fire"—to be replied to by the corporal with a ready wave of his helmet. I could hardly believe the evidence of my eyes, and was at a loss to account for the reason of the reprieve. Could it possibly mean that the Germans contemplated a return to the town, to there give battle to our men? This to me at the time seemed the only reasonable solution, and if this should be so, I realised that with their return our plight must continue unless we at once made our effort. I resolved to delay action in the hope of being able to discover the reason for the enemy's change of attitude, and then, if my surmise should prove to be correct, to chance all.

Procrastination has its demerits, but on this occasion no wavering attitude could have met with so happy a result. In a few seconds after the arrival of the messenger

we knew all. The plan of firing the town had been discarded by reason of the strong wind, which, blowing from the north, would prove hazardous to the retreating troops.

The relief which came to me when I realised our extraordinary good fortune was almost painful, and, now that escape was so near at hand, I felt less capable of action than when the need of a resolute attitude had been so vital. I watched the preparations of our jailers with a lassitude almost amounting to indifference, and indeed, so astounding an effect did the good news produce upon my mentality, that, though the last of the enemy had disappeared in the distance before the first hour after noon, it was not until some full thirty minutes had elapsed that I sufficiently recovered myself to creep forth from my prison.

The long confinement in the cramped space told upon me hardly, and it was not for a considerable time that I could do more than squat upon the ground, but after a sharp bout of massage from Nikko, who had been scarcely affected by the ordeal, I eventually regained full use of my limbs. Our water-bottles had long been exhausted of their precious contents, which made imperative their replenishment, so, with the hope of unearthing some supply left over by the late occupants, we diligently searched the neighbouring huts.

Drawing blank at the first row of huts, we began to despair of success, when to our joy and thankfulness we came upon a cask, with sufficient water therein to supply our immediate needs and to fill our bottles. Thirst had so tantalised me that I scarcely heeded the risk of poison, though I restrained Nikko from partaking of the

cask's contents until I had satisfied myself that there was no immediate danger. When my faithful henchman did at last get his mouth down to the job, it seemed as if his thirst never could be assuaged, and when finally he had drunk his fill his stomach protruded with a pronounced bulge.

Of anything edible we found none, but that did not worry me, for I knew that, as soon as we reached the neighbouring scrub, it would not be long before we should be able to satisfy the pangs of hunger with a bird of some description or other. I had reckoned that by now our troops would be within a day's march of Soba, and though the sun beat down with terrific intensity, I decided to commence our trek, and, if needs be, camp in the forest until sundown. A couple of hours' steady going would bring us to its confines, where the wants of the inner man could be promptly attended to before continuing on our journey.

With this intention in view we set out, but we had covered scarcely a couple of miles before I was constrained to call a halt, so weak had I become from the enforced imprisonment in the woodstack. However, after long and painful progress and many pauses, the shelter of the forest was reached, where I flung myself down to rest, leaving Nikko, who seemed to have scarcely turned a hair, to forage for our breakfast.

It seemed but a few seconds, but actually, as a glance at my wrist watch showed, I had been sleeping for half an hour, when I was awakened by the noise of a shot close at hand, assuring me that Nikko had caught sight of game, and I then started to collect some twigs in preparation



As he came within speaking distance, he shouted, "Army, him come."

for the cooking of the bag, but I had no more than picked up a handful when from a considerable distance off and in another direction came the report of a rifle.

Through the scattered bushes I saw Nikko hurrying along, a bush pig saddled across his shoulder, and as he came within speaking distance he shouted, "Army, him come."

And so it was, for in reply to my revolver there came at intervals rifle reports, and by the time our breakfast had arrived at the proper moment for consumption, a shout came through the dense bush on our right, to be followed shortly after by the appearance of Ted and Stubby. Major Currie had put forward his advance a day, and Ted, in charge of an advance guard, was a few miles ahead of the remainder of the forces.

SB. AN.

As quietly as I could, I related the recent experiences of Nikko and myself in Soba, and at the mention of Salad's diabolical plot of poisoning the wells, Ted, for the first time, expressed his regret that he had been so weak as to spare his life on a previous occasion.

First sending word back to headquarters explaining the situation, Ted joined us in tackling the provender provided through Nikko's handiwork, and to me, at any rate, seldom had food tasted sweeter.

CHAPTER III

IN the long, weary trek southwards, in the wake of the enemy, many days passed before we came in touch with them at any

point. Though, occasionally skirmishing occurred between our advance and the enemy's rearguards, not until we arrived within a few miles of Ngaundere were there any signs of coming to grips. Nor, as a matter of fact, did we ever actually clash, for on the very day when Major Currie was about to attack, news came of Germany's capitulation. And on the eve of peace came the end of Salad.

We had emerged from the hilly country and arrived within a week's march of Ngaundere, with a somewhat depleted force, for malaria had taken a heavy toll of our natives, our supplies of quinine proving totally inadequate for so long a march. However, this had been remedied at Ubangi, where we had been reinforced by the French contingent, and leaving our casualties at that place, we had together marched towards Ngaundere.

We learned from our allies that, since our reverses at Garna and Tepe, the Germans had been hard pressed, so much so that Duala was expected to fall at any moment. This was comforting news, indeed, which acted like a tonic on our jaded troops. The position of affairs the day before the capitulation of Germany was that Salad and his party lay encamped on the outskirts of Duala, whilst we were some three miles away.

The past two or three days had been a very busy time for my department, and I had been able to bring in some very useful intelligence as to the morale of the opposing troops. I found out that desertions had been wholesale, and learnt from one of those who had escaped from the German yoke that many of the German staff were down with fever, and that at the first attack the native troops would be

more likely to throw down their arms and bolt than offer any resistance.

It was upon receipt of this information that Major Currie had decided upon attack on the morrow, and had accordingly arranged for a "pow-wow" overnight. The natives' superstitious fear of encountering evil spirits in the darkness had made a night attack out of the question, consequently the factor of surprise would be absent from our tactics.

But as eventually no engagement took place, little use would there be in putting on paper the plans emanating from the fertile brain of our C.O.; suffice it to say that at the termination of the meeting Stubby, together with Hugh Martin and Jim Fellows, adjourned to our tent to pass the evening in good fellowship. The life and soul of that gathering was the little "Padre"—the Rev. "Stubby"—whom, in the days of his tutorship of us, we had been wont to regard in rather slighting fashion, but whose figure will ever be engraved upon our memories as that of a very gallant gentleman. "Greater love hath no man than that he give up his life for another," and this, ere the dawn of another day broke, was to be his fate.

The camp was quiet and sleeping long before our happy little gathering broke up, and when the last had departed to snatch a few hours' rest preparatory for the great ordeal of the morrow, Ted and Tom turned in, whilst I myself, being on duty that night, set out with Nikko to visit the sentry posts. The moon was at its full, and save for the dark shadows cast from the tall trees and dense bushes scattered around the camp, it was as light as if the break of dawn had already arrived. I

could not help my thoughts wandering as to coming events, and though I rarely took a gloomy outlook on life, on this occasion I was struck with a foreboding of coming evil.

My objective that night was the lines on the southern approach to our camp, a little over a mile distant, where it was my intention to leave Nikko until the moment of advance arrived. Everything was in order at the first post visited, but at the spot where the second post should have been no challenge met us. Constant inspection of the sentry posts at night had been rendered urgent, on account of the dread of darkness, which all native troops possessed, for we had discovered at the outset that it was no unusual happening for the sentries to leave their posts and cluster together for the sake of companionship.

Upon receiving no challenge at this second post, I at once jumped to the conclusion that the sentry had joined his companion farther up the lines, so with wrath kindling at so reprehensible an act on the eve of battle, I hurried forward. But as I emerged from the shade of a tall bush, my left foot struck some object, tripping me up and bringing me to my knees, and in the effort to save myself I did what one naturally does on such occasions, thrust my arms out to break the fall.

The first thing my hands touched was yielding flesh, which instinctively I gripped tight with my fingers, to instantaneously relax as moisture oozed over them. I was up on my feet in a second, shouting to Nikko to turn his electric torch on (an instrument which I occasionally entrusted him with and which proved to him an everlasting joy), and, as the ray of light

shone down, there beneath us lay the dead body of the sentry with a knife through his heart. Nikko withdrew the weapon from the inanimate body, saying, as he fingered it—"Kiko—him de frowning knife."

At his words the foreboding of evil returned, and the sight of the throwing-knife recalled to me the extraordinary incident in Salad's study at Syston School, where I had discovered him practising the art of knife-throwing upon a life-size drawing of the human figure stuck up on the study wall. Nor was this the only occasion upon which there was reason to connect Salad's name with throwing-knives.

The primary reason of his expulsion from Syston was the maiming of Ted by these means, and this had been followed by the wanton acts of cruelty upon my guardian, Stubby, and Hugh Martyn, when all three had fallen into his hands at Aba. And then had occurred his treacherous attempt upon Ted at the Lake of Sacrifice, when, believing Salad to be on the point of surrender, Ted, approaching to within a few yards of him, had but narrowly escaped from the weapon hurled at him.

With the memory of this incident to add to my perturbation, small wonder was it that I should be filled with concern as to the object of this, which I had no doubt in my mind was Salad's handiwork. This desperate endeavour was no mere attempt to penetrate into our camp for information—it could only mean one thing, and that the gratification of personal revenge. Salad was within our lines, and if his murderous intentions were to be frustrated, it behoved me to act quickly.

For aught I knew, he might not have

yet reached the heart of the camp, might, indeed, be now lurking in the bushes close at hand, but this thought did not disturb me, for all that I prayed was to reach our tent to sound my warning. So, breaking into a run whenever the smooth going and clear light permitted, we covered the way back to camp speedily, stopping only once at the guard-house to issue orders for the reinforcement of the sentry posts.

This necessary duty accomplished, I hurried towards our tent, and, with fingers trembling with anxiety, lifted the flap and entered within. The slight disturbance sufficed to awaken the inmates, and, as I flashed my torch, I saw Ted and Tom sitting up, each with a look of indignation on his face at the interruption. The relief at finding my worst fears unrealised left me for a moment speechless, but the voice of Ted soon brought my scattered senses back to realities.

"What the dickens brings you back again so soon?" he said in aggrieved tones; "here it is only just half-past twelve, and you weren't off duty till two. What's up? Don't tell me that the enemy have stolen a march upon us and are going to produce a night 'stunt.' Come on, young-fellow-me-lad, out with it—we'll try and bear up under the dreadful news. Get it out quickly—let's know the worst or best, because I'm all for a continuation of my game of 'shut-eye' at the earliest possible opportunity."

Before replying I pushed the throwing-knife across to him, and as he looked at it with a puzzled glance I related to him the circumstances by which it had come into my hands, ending up by affirming my conviction as to its ownership. As I rather

expected, Ted pooh-poohed the idea altogether, and chaffed me, as he usually did, with having Salad on the brain.

"What on earth would Salad want in this camp? He wouldn't be idiot enough to creep in here just to have another dig at me. It's all tosh, Dick; you're making me out to be a most important young fellow. The whole war doesn't depend on their nabbing me. No, I'm quite sure old Salad wouldn't risk his precious carcass just to get a bit of his own back. Much more likely to wait until peace is declared and he meets me on a dark night. But it ain't a guinea to a gooseberry that, when this show is over, the nigger and I will shake hands and be 'hoofing' the football about together in Lagos. Stranger things than that have happened."

But this spirit of levity I would have none of, and, though I could not impress Ted of its seriousness, I did succeed in inducing Tom to share a little of my anxiety. And fortunate, indeed, was it so.

The altercation had effectually banished sleep, and Ted, more from a desire to show me up as an alarmist than from any anxiety regarding his own safety, consented to a search being made at any rate in the vicinity of our tent. By this time the Rev. Stubby, in the tent adjoining ours, aroused by the noise of our conversation, had joined us, and upon hearing the reason of our movements, readily commended my suggestion. Accordingly we made a move towards the fringe of bush not a dozen yards to our rear, and Ted, leading, had proceeded but half the distance, when from out of the covert jumped a figure with hand upraised in the action of throwing. And then seemingly without pausing to take aim,

the movement was completed and the weapon discharged.

From my position in the line, for we had spread in couples, Stubby being with Ted, in the clear moonlight I caught the glint of steel as it hurtled through the air—heard a scurrying of feet and a subdued whimper of pain, and before Tom and I,

long belt of thick bush, not more than forty yards ahead of him. As he was at least that distance in front of us my spirits fell, for I realised that once inside that thick cover, Salad—for that it was that blackguard I was fully assured—would be immune from immediate capture.

Seeing the hopelessness of it, I suggested



I shall never forget the grim struggle which ensued.

both foolishly weaponless, covered the intervening space, a figure subsided to the ground, the figure of Stubby.

The next moment, into the bushes dived the murderous assailant with Tom and myself at his heels. Through the prickly undergrowth we plunged our way, to finally emerge into a clearing, where we saw our quarry making for the sanctuary of a farther

to Tom that we should return, and this we were on the point of doing when there came a happening which sent the blood thrilling through our veins. Salad was down and seemingly in the clutches of a wild beast. Though I made my best efforts to reach the spot speedily, Tom, of course, arrived there well ahead of me, and as I was some distance off, shouted, "It's Nikko!"

I shall never forget the grim struggle which ensued under the clear light of the West African moon. When I came up the men were locked together in a deadly embrace, each of them intent on snatching at his knife when opportunity should permit. The sudden shock had sent Salad hurling to the ground with Nikko on top of him, a position which he did not hold for long, since Salad, with a skilful lurch of the body and a cunning twist of the arms, succeeded in reversing affairs. Tom rushed forward to pinion Salad's arms, but before he had put a finger on him Nikko had once more obtained the upper hand.

But for the foolishness of engaging in the search unarmed, the struggle would have soon been over, for neither Tom nor I would have scrupled to have taken extreme measures if Salad had refused to surrender. We should then have been spared the long period of stalemate which followed. Save for occasional spasmodic bursts after the first few moments, the deadly struggle subsided into a period of inactivity, both contestants warily gripping the other's arms.

A manœuvre of Salad's nearly brought about the downfall of Nikko, inasmuch as it caused a slight loosening of grip, but which fortunately he succeeded in recovering. Salad with a sudden heave upwards had butted Nikko on the proboscis, from which the blood at once spouted forth. Painful though the collision must have been, it was a fortunate circumstance, since it opened the door of Nikko's chamber of common sense to the necessity of adopting a similar procedure.

Now, in the matter of force there is no comparison between a butt delivered from

the man underneath and the man on top, as Nikko, after a slight pause, proceeded to demonstrate. Following another bout of frantic wrestling, Nikko caught Salad in an unguarded moment, and bringing his head down with the force of a coal-hammer upon that individual's chin, dazed him for the fraction of a second, and up went his head. And in that fraction of a second the beginning of the end came. Before Salad had time to realise the peril of his unguarded throat, the teeth of Nikko were firmly embedded therein.

Realising full well that no power of Salad's could release that deadly pressure, and nauseated by the disgusting spectacle, I turned my back on the scene. When at last Tom called to me, I turned to see that Salad had at last paid the penalty for his treacherous misdeeds. Relief instantly came to me at the knowledge that his evil intentions were at last ended, but relief not untinged with pity that one who had enjoyed the privilege of Public School life should have so far forgotten its traditions as to adopt the rôle of a murderous footpad.

Leaving the remains of Salad to await a more fitting time for interment, we hurried back to camp to learn that the Rev. Stubby had passed away in the arms of the man for whom he had made the sacrifice—Ted. Ted was beside himself with grief, unceasingly reproaching himself for having been the innocent cause of Stubby's sad end. Repeatedly he vowed to avenge the "Padre's" death, and would have then and there rushed out of the tent for that object, if I had not restrained him, to inform him of the fruitlessness of his errand. Even the knowledge that Stubby had already been avenged did not

console him, for in the frame of mind he was then in he appeared to regard it as an act of injustice that he should have been robbed of the opportunity of inflicting personally the righteous penalty on Salad.

However, the need for preparations for the coming attack allowed small time for introspection, and, with the hour now so close at hand, the necessity of interring all that remained of the gallant little Padre—our erstwhile tutor—was urgent. And this we did in the light of a waning moon on the very spot upon which the act of heroism had been done, and as the last clod of earth fell upon the grave of the Rev. Septimus Stubbs, it was as much as I could do to restrain the tears coming to my eyes. Nor do I think that I was the only one among those assembled around to whom the restraint of emotion was more than passing difficult, for the scene was one of ineffable sadness.

More than once in after years have I stood before that raised mound with its rude wooden cross in the bush around

Ngaundere, and always has the vision of that early morning passed before my eyes, bringing with it poignant memories.

Poor Stubby was the last casualty which I was destined to see in West Africa. If only that cursed Salad had delayed his fierce lust for revenge, even that one would have been averted. Before ever our force had formed up to march upon Ngaundere there came into camp escorted by our outposts a German officer of the rank of major, bringing with him the news of capitulation. Thus came to an end my experience of military service, for, try though I did to induce the Home authorities to employ me on other fronts, no success met my continuous efforts.

As I look back upon those first few years of my West African career, it all seems a huge nightmare to me, and even now, though many years have since passed over my head, the image of Salad as he lay cold and still in the scrub around Ngaundere, shows clear before my eyes as if it were but yesterday. Revenge may be sweet, but of a surety a day of reckoning cometh.

How to Build a Model Theatre

By G. E. HOPCROFT

BOYS who delight in model-making are usually on the lookout for something novel and interesting, something that they can construct themselves, and which will afford them amusement during the long winter evenings, or out on the lawn in the dusk of a summer night. Have you, reader, ever thought of making a Model Theatre, one in which you can stage real plays, using puppet actors? At a single stroke you can become the architect, stage manager, and lessee of a theatre!

In order to please both those who want simply a stage and those who wish to construct the complete theatre, I have devised a method of making the stage quite separate from the main body of the model, but the two sections can easily be fitted together. Models of this kind, if made with care, look very well, and the glow of a well-lighted stage is most pleasing; one gets some of the thrills of the real play. It is well, when making a model of this kind, to keep as near to the actual thing as possible, and, before launching out as a stage manager, study the plans, particularly the ground plan (Fig. 1, Plan 2), which gives an idea of what I propose you shall build.

As it is preferable that the model should be built upon a good firm base, I advise

you to get a piece of wood 1 inch thick for the floor of the theatre, and another piece, say, 2 inches thick, for the floor of the stage, which should, of course, be raised above the "pit." After due consideration I came to the conclusion that it would be better not to bind you down to any definite size, for one boy will probably wish to build a small theatre, whilst another will like to have something bigger. So long as you keep roughly to the proportions shown on the diagrams you cannot go far wrong.

Study, first of all, the ground plan (see Fig. 1, Plan 2). On this plan the section on the right shows one floor of the theatre—*P* being the pit—but on the left you have the stage section, quite apart from the rest of the building. The section marked *P* (the pit) I have grained lightly, but the "dress circle" is more heavily grained, and the "boxes" are of a still darker tint. On this plan (No. 2), Fig. 5 shows the theatre as it would look viewed from the front, and Fig. 8 a cross-section showing the boxes and a part of the pit, dress circle, etc.

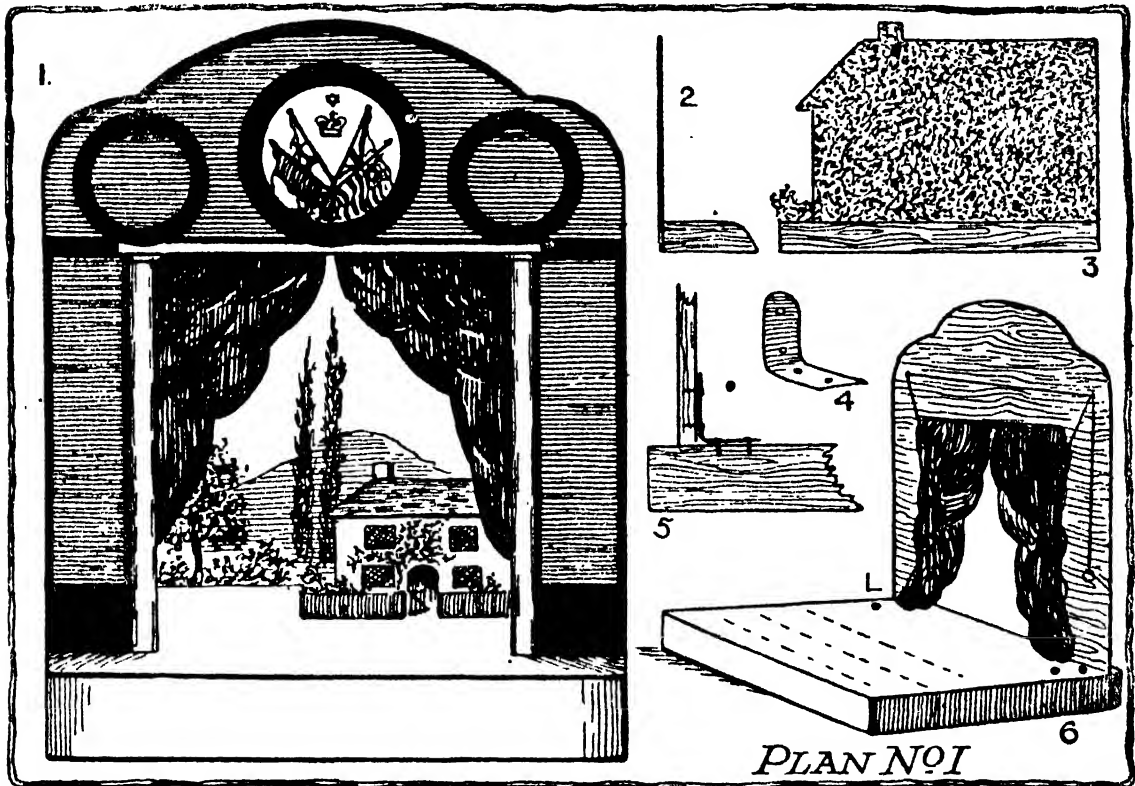
Any ordinary wood will do for the bases, but for the walls of the theatre soft, smooth wood, about $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick, will be found most useful. The lighter parts of the building—the floors and the guard-rails

of the dress circle, the boxes, etc., should be made of thin fret or veneer wood.

Possibly it will be advisable to make the stage first of all, and for this see that the base is at least 2 inches thick, since the stage must be raised slightly above the pit. As you will wish to arrange the scenes

many boys would be unable to follow. On your stage, however, the parts drawn black on the diagram would not, of course, be dead black—dark red, for example, would look nice.

Having cut the front of the stage, set it up, in the manner shown on Fig. 5



and whatever kind of puppets you decide to use in the plays, it is hardly necessary to make side walls to the stage (see Fig. 6, Plan No. 1). On Fig. 1, Plan 1, I have given a front which can be cut out of one thin piece of wood with a fretsaw, and the decorative designs are of a type which you can paint in quite easily, as I have avoided all kinds of scroll work which

(Plan 1). Make a couple of small angle irons similar to that shown on Fig. 4. These can be made of thick tin, thin galvanised iron, or brass. The method of screwing these angle irons to the base and to the front is shown on Fig. 5.

As it would be almost impossible to make footlights small enough to fit even a large model theatre, I think the best way

of lighting the stage will be to use two small bicycle lamps, placing them in the positions shown on each side of the letter C, Fig. 1, Plan 2, and by the letter L, Fig. 6, Plan 1. On Plan 2, S shows the scenes and C the position of the curtain. The whole mode of raising the curtain and the general arrangement of the back of the stage is given on Fig. 6, Plan 1.

The upright pillars on each side of the front of the stage can be made out of a new and very smooth broomstick, or, if you care to do so, get a turner to turn two pillars—he will probably make them quite ornamental. These pillars can be glued to the front of the stage.

The curtains would look nice if made of some dark red material; note how the cords which raise and lower them are taken through two screw-eyes placed at the top of the back of the stage; the two lines meet at, and are attached to, a single ring (see diagrams).

The scenery is of some importance, and I advise you to paint it on smooth, white cardboard with water colours. With a model, scenery which needed rollers would be rather clumsy and difficult to manage, therefore scenes painted on cardboard and attached to blocks of wood after the manner of the cottage shown on Figs. 2 and 3, Plan 1, are best. This kind will stand upright without support, and can quickly be placed in any position on the stage (the dotted lines on Fig. 6 are intended to indicate where the scenes should stand). Note that the cottage shown on Fig. 3 is to be cut out, but backgrounds should be painted on card large enough to cover the whole back of the stage. The back scene with trees and a hill will explain what I mean—see Fig. 1, Plan 1.

Scenery can be made very artistic. Go to a theatre and look at the wonderful scenes that are now staged. I remember seeing a wood made up in a number of sections, and beyond was a sunlight view showing mountains and a lake; the whole effect was very beautiful. The deck scene in *Peter Pan* is well worth seeing too; in fact you can get many an idea for your model theatre from the scenery of Sir James Barrie's masterpiece.

The front of the stage should, of course, be painted with oil paint (varnished) or art enamel.

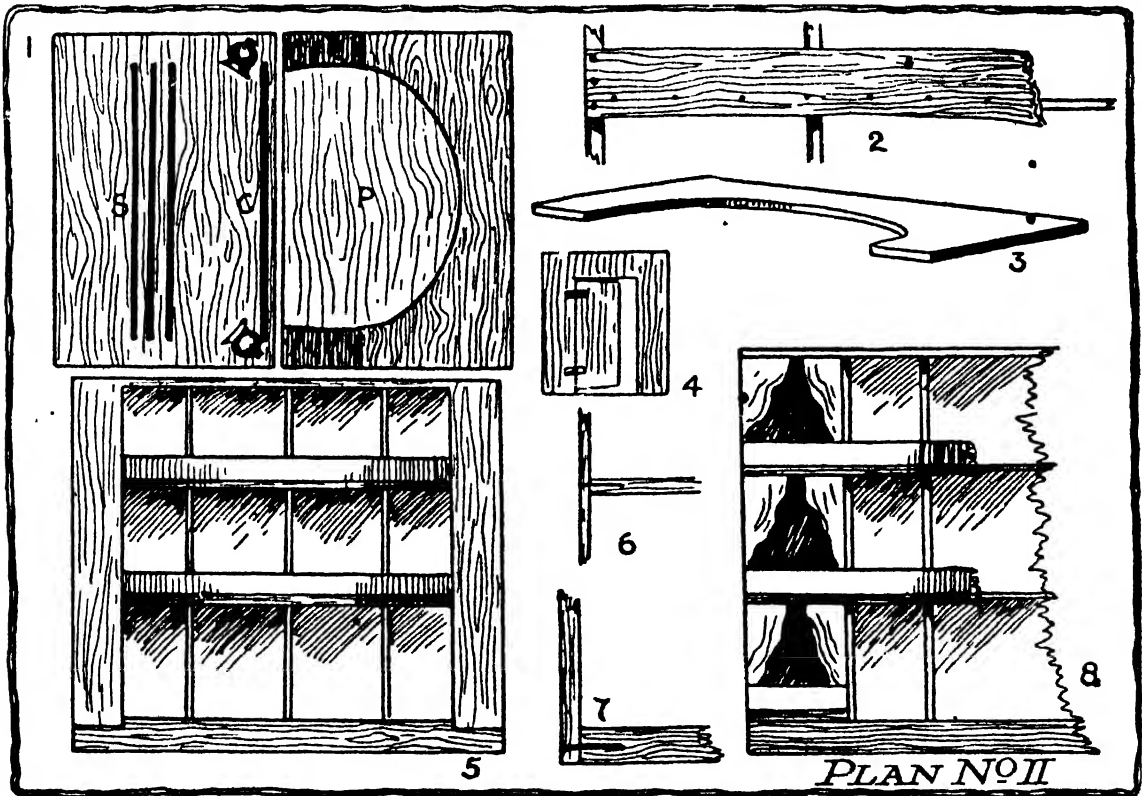
Now, if you have decided to make the body of the theatre with the boxes, dress circle, etc., turn to Plan No. 2. The walls of the building will be screwed to the thick base-block in the manner shown on Fig. 7, but it is not advisable to fit a roof; if you did, it would be difficult to see the inside of the building. Probably you will detach the stage from the body of the theatre when you wish to give a performance.

All the details of building this part of the theatre are shown on Plan No. 2. The small round sticks used for window blinds could be made to represent the uprights which hold up the dress circle, etc., but be sure to cut each of the upper floor sections like Fig. 3. These sections can be cut out with a fretsaw, and could be fitted upon small blocks of wood glued to the walls of the theatre: thin veneer wood would be best for the guard-rails round the upper floors. Fix the strips to the floors with tiny screws or black pins, which are stronger than white ones. This process is clearly shown on Figs 2 and 6, Plan No. 2.

Some little trouble should be taken with the private boxes, and curtains should be arranged in them as shown. The partitions between these boxes and the circles, and the pit should be made like Fig. 4; if small strips of cloth are

the wood and give it a thin coating of weak glue.

With a model of this kind, the inside and the inside fittings are of the greatest importance; nevertheless, with all kinds of models one has to decide upon the



glued to the doors, as shown, they will make good hinges.

Probably you will not go to the length of fitting chairs in your theatre, and whether you fit seats of any kind is, of course, optional. The whole of the inside should, however, be nicely enamelled or varnished. Before painting any portion of the model, however, well glass-paper

point at which to stop in the matter of realism. Probably you will leave the outside of the building plain, but, if you wish the theatre to be perfectly correct, windows, doors, and an entrance could be painted in with artists' oil paint.

The two sections of the theatre can be brought together readily, and some kind

of catch or hinge could be fitted to hold the two portions in position.

Now, for a moment or two, let us return to the scenery and the puppets, which no doubt you will use as actors. The scenery is of very great importance, and must, I need hardly say, be specially painted to suit whatever play you decide to produce. If you are not sure of yourself, trace anything you wish—say, a wind-mill or a cottage—on tracing paper, then rub the back of the paper well with a lead pencil, lay the tracing on the cardboard you use for the scene, and go heavily over the drawing with a pencil, or even a sharp-pointed instrument. The outline will then be transferred to the cardboard, and you can finish the scene with water colours.

Unless you use marionettes, I advise you to have tableaux rather than scenes that have to be acted, for it will be difficult to give dummy figures lifelike motion. Figures of any kind could be used, but this type of piece hardly comes within the scope of this article, which deals with the making of the theatre itself. One or two suggestions, however, may not be amiss. A series of tableaux dealing with scenes from history would be decidedly interesting. The coming of the Spanish Armada, for example, with a first scene showing Drake playing bowls on Plymouth Hoe would be grand.

Scenes showing the white cliffs of Old England would be effective, and not very difficult to paint, and, moreover, they would give a sense of expanse.

I need hardly add that the curtain would be lowered between each tableaux, and, with the firm cardboard scenes which can be set up or removed in a moment, the

intervals between the episodes need not be long ones.

Probably, unless your theatre is large enough to have real footlights, it will be difficult to improve upon the bicycle-lamp mode of lighting, and as the flame is entirely enclosed, these lamps are safer than any other kind. If you make a very large model, it might be possible to use small footlights and Christmas candles. I do not advise you to try this plan, however, because the candles would be difficult to manage and would gutter away unevenly.

General Hints.

If you wish to fit seats in your theatre, long strips of wood, covered with plush, might be made to look very realistic. Proper backs could be glued in position, and small slabs of cork glued under each seat to raise it clear of the floor.

A roof to take off and on could be fitted, but probably you will prefer the open top. In the same way there is no reason why sides should not be fitted to the stage, but when a performance is in progress you will certainly have to remove these sides, as otherwise every time the scenery or the "actors" were moved, it would be necessary to take them down.

Great care should be taken to paint the theatre neatly and to finish off the various parts in a workmanlike manner. Nothing looks so bad as a model crudely painted—this kind of thing labels a model "home-made" for all time. Use soft camel-hair brushes, and if the paint or enamel is too thick, dilute it with a little turpentine.

See that the curtain falls evenly, for it is rather disconcerting at the end of an

act to find that it will not come down. A few tiny mites of lead fastened to the lower parts of the curtain will help to make it drop easily.

Making the Figures or Puppets.

Various kinds of figures are used in model theatres, some of them being flat, whilst others again are made like ordinary wax figures. If you choose the flat kind of puppets, you can use water colours for painting them, and afterwards cut out each figure with scissors or a sharp pen-knife. Flat figures do not look so well as the more solid kind, however, but the arms and legs can be made movable and these, if necessary, can be worked with cords after the manner of marionettes.

Doubtless you will wish to make properly dressed figures, and these can be produced in various ways. Certain kinds of small dolls can be touched up and re-dressed so as to make up into extremely pre-

sentable stage figures, and various kinds of small male figures can be bought ready-made at the big stores. Those of my readers who like to make everything for themselves can try making wax figures for their theatre. Possibly it would be better not to cast the face, as it would be difficult to make a mould. First of all make the head roughly as a ball of wax, and then, with the small blade of a pen-knife gradually carve out the face. In any case be very careful how you dress your figures; small pieces of coloured silk stuck to them with some strong adhesive, would perhaps be better than made-up clothes, which would look clumsy on tiny "actors." By means of wires it would be possible to make the figures move their arms and legs, but I am inclined to favour a series of tableaux, rather than scenes in which movement is necessary.

A set of little figures dressed in the costumes of the Georgian period, with wigs, knee breeches, etc., would look well.



CHAPTER I

THE PIRATE'S GHOST

OF all the boys assembled for evening prep. in the Big School at Radhurst College, not one appeared to be working harder than S. P. Metching, but instead of Livy, the book he was studying was one entitled *The Pirate's Ghost*.

It was a fascinating story of lost treasure, and a "South Pacific Isle." The hero, a lonely castaway, seemed on the point of discovering the secret burial place of the pirate's gold.

Metching finished the chapter, and began another. The way in which he had become possessed of the book he was reading, was characteristic of the boy himself. He had found it lying on a window ledge in the passage leading to the dining-hall, and, as

it looked interesting, he had calmly put it in his pocket. The thought that some one else might be half-way through the story, and dying to know if the treasure was found, did not trouble him in the least.

Yes. Tom Brace had found the treasure, but, even as he broke open the lid of the heavy chest, a bullet whistled past his head. Who could have fired that shot? Metching felt simply obliged to discover the answer to this question, and went on reading till the story was finished. With a sigh he slipped the book out of sight, and, conscious at last of how much time had been wasted, he began a desperate struggle with his Latin. He made very little sense of the translation, and contented himself with finding out the meanings of the words.

"Now for maths," he muttered.

He opened his algebra, but, before he had time to put pen to paper, the bell

rang, and a hum of voices announced the fact that prep. had come to an end.

"Hang it all," growled Metching, "there are seven of these beastly sums, and I haven't done one."

There was a tramp of feet as the crowd of boys poured out of the Big School into the evening sunshine, and raced across the quad. Metching lingered behind the rest, hunting for a piece of india-rubber which had fallen off the desk, and, when he reached the Lower Fifth class-room which, out of school hours, was used as a day-room by members of the form, the majority of his comrades had put their books away, and trooped off to the dining-hall for supper. Four of them, however, were standing in a group talking about the Cook Dormitory match which was to be played the following day. It may be said that attendance at supper was not compulsory.

"Look here, Langton, don't you start slogging till you've got your eye in," cautioned Moore.

"Oh, I shall be careful, don't you fret," was the reply. "But I hope to goodness I do lift a few. It'll be a jolly close game, and we shall want every run we can get."

Metching took no interest in cricket. He tossed his school books into his locker, but kept *The Pirate's Ghost* in his hand, meaning to get rid of it on his way to the dining-hall. He turned to make for the door, and, as he did so, he caught sight of something lying almost at his feet. He stooped down and picked it up—a sheet of paper, both sides of which were covered with neat and orderly blocks of algebraical signs and symbols. It bore the name of J. Heal, a fellow who, in the last week's form-order, had been bracketed first with Shirley.

"He must have dropped this when he was putting his books away," thought Metching. "I'd better stick it in his locker."

Suddenly he realised what the paper really was—Heal's algebra, the sums he had done in prep. Though a sluggard in work, Metching could think fast enough when he chose, and now one idea after another flashed through his brain. These were the very sums he himself ought to have done, and why shouldn't he copy, say, the first four, which would be enough to save him from being kept in. It would be a quick and easy way out of the difficulty, and do no one any harm. It was not like cribbing to win a prize.

"That's what I'll do," he said to himself. "When I've finished with it, I'll put this paper in Heal's locker, and he'll never know he let it drop."

Metching cast a glance over his shoulder. He did not wish to be seen with the paper in his hand, so he folded it double and slipped it inside *The Pirate's Ghost*. He fidgeted about, waiting till he had the class-room to himself before he made his copy, but Langton and his friends still continued their conversation about the match. Presently one of them produced a bag of biscuits, and they began to share its contents. It was clear now that they had no intention of going to the dining-hall for their supper.

"Confound those fellows," growled Metching inwardly. "They'll give me away if they see what I'm doing, and Heal's such a mean blighter he's sure to kick up a row."

He thought for a moment, then took a sheet of paper from his locker, and hurried off to a small room in the basement devoted

to music practice,' which was always deserted at this hour of the day. He closed the door, produced his fountain pen, and seated himself at the piano, using its closed keyboard as a desk.

"Now we shan't be long," he muttered.

But valuable time had been lost in the class-room, and it took him longer to copy the sums than he had expected. Some minutes before he finished, muffled sounds which reached his ear told that boys below the Sixth were passing on to bed.

"Must be quick," thought Metching.

He had forgotten to bring any blotting paper, so lingered a few seconds, waving his sums in the air till the ink was dry; by the time he reached the Lower Fifth class-room it was deserted, and the tramp of feet ascending the main staircase had ceased. In hot haste Metching tossed *The Pirate's Ghost* down on the end of the nearest desk, then stowed the sheet of sums away in his locker. He was in the act of closing the cupboard door, when Bourne, one of the prefects, swung into the room.

"Hallo, how is it you aren't in bed?" demanded the newcomer. "Look alive, clear off, or——"

Metching did not wait for the sentence to be completed, he was off like a shot, and, on reaching C Dormitory, he dived into his cubicle without his late arrival being noticed by the other occupants of the room. He undressed, scrambled into bed, and was about to lay his head on the pillow with a sigh of relief, when a most disturbing thought flashed into his mind.

"What a fool I am," he said to himself. "I put Heal's algebra paper in that book, and left it lying about in the class-room. If Bourne hadn't come in and jumped on

me—well, it's done now, and can't be helped."

For a time Metching comforted himself with the thought that he could put things straight in the morning, then he began to feel anxious. If some of the other fellows in the Lower Fifth got downstairs before he did, there was a good chance that *The Pirate's Ghost* would be meddled with, the sheet of sums would be found, and Heal, on being told of the discovery, would be in a fearful rage. It would seem so mysterious that all kinds of questions would be asked, and there was bound to be a row.

"I must do something," pondered Metching. "If I leave it till morning it may be too late."

There was only one way out of the difficulty; it was a case of running a small risk to avoid a greater, and gradually Metching nerved himself to a decision.

"That's what I must do," he thought. "It won't take five minutes."

The next three hours seemed to him the longest he had ever spent, but he managed to keep awake, and it was some time after the big clock in the school turret had struck midnight that he crept out of bed, and put on a coat over the jacket of his pyjamas. The sound of heavy breathing told that all the other occupants of C Dormitory were fast asleep. Treading like a cat, he stole out of the room, paused a moment to listen, then sped off along the landing, and down the stairs.

"Good egg!" he whispered.

Sufficient moonlight came through the big windows of the Lower Fifth class-room for him to see that *The Pirate's Ghost* was still lying on the desk, as he had left it when he bolted from the irate prefect. He picked up the book, then struck a

match to make sure he was putting the sheet of sums into the right locker. Here it was, the figure 9 marked on the door—yes, that was Heal's number.

"Now what shall I do with this book? Better put it where I found it—on the window ledge in the passage."

When, at last, Metching regained his cubicle and crept into bed, he had the satisfaction of feeling dead sure that no one in the place could possibly know he had been outside his dormitory.

"All straight now," he chuckled noiselessly. "Safe at last."

CHAPTER II

THE COPIED BLUNDER

WHEN the Lower Fifth assembled in their class-room after break, for the last hour of morning school, they found themselves ahead of their master, who had not yet appeared on the scene.

"Shore's lost himself," said Graham. "He'll turn up in the fines basket, and we shall have to pay a penny to get him out. Look here, which dormitory is going to win the match this afternoon?"

"C, of course," shouted Moore. "Langton's going to make a century—two if we want 'em. You see if he doesn't."

There was a laugh. Langton was well liked in the Lower Fifth, and even those members of the class who were in the rival team were not likely to begrudge him a good innings. It would make him more sure of a place in the First Eleven next year.

"If Langton makes a century he ought
SB. AN.

to stand us ices all round," began Graham. "We'll have a—"

The speech was cut short by the entrance of Mr. Shore. He took his seat, and told the head boy to collect the algebra papers which had been done in prep. the previous night. He placed them on his desk, then leant back in his chair, and remained for a moment lost in thought.

"Langton," he said suddenly, "have you got a book called *The Pirate's Ghost*?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it?"

"It's in my locker, 'sir."

"Then bring it here."

The order was obeyed, the whole class wondering what it meant. Mr. Shore glanced at the book, then laid it aside, and, leaning forward, selected a paper from the pile.

"Heal, did you do this work in preparation last night?"

"Yes, sir."

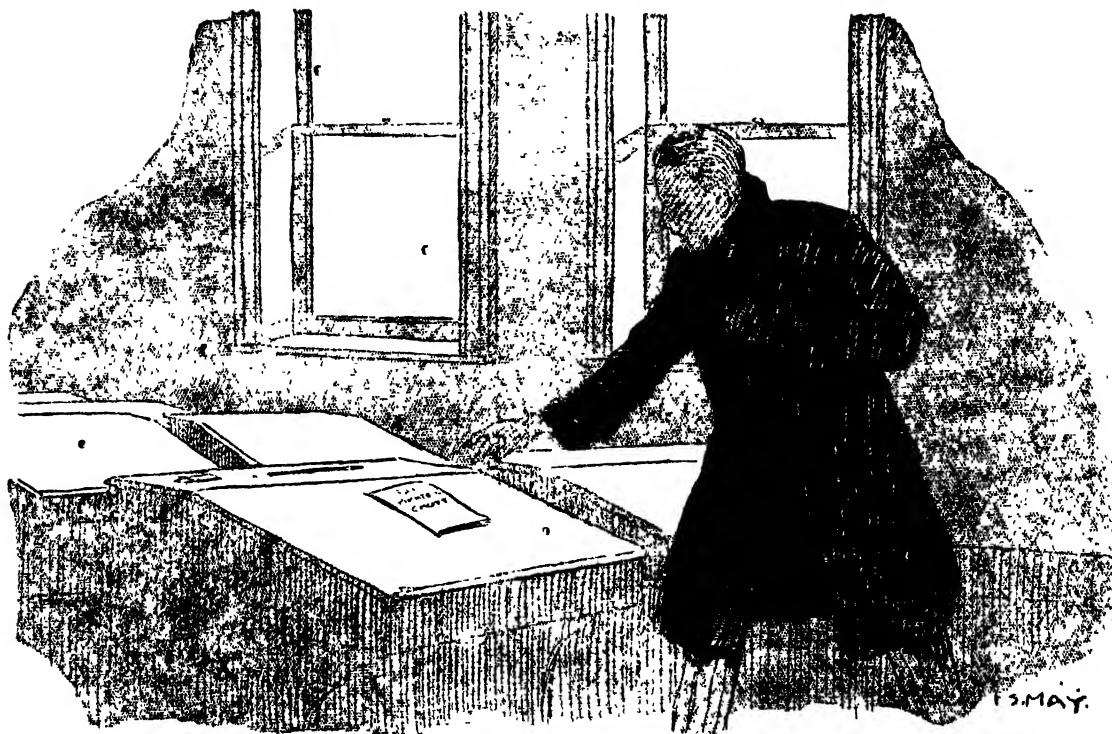
"And afterwards did you lend this paper to Langton for him to make a copy?"

"No, sir," gasped Heal, with a look of blank astonishment. "I put it away in my locker."

There was a pause.

"I came in here after you boys had gone to bed," began Mr. Shore, "and I caught sight of this book lying on one of the desks. I picked it up, and found inside it a sheet of algebra sums—the sheet I'm now holding in my hand. As the book had your name, Langton, written in pencil on the flyleaf, there was little doubt as to whom it belonged. I presumed you'd borrowed these sums to copy them, as you'd been too lazy to do the work in preparation."

"P-please, sir, I know nothing about it," stammered Langton, utterly flabber-



"Good egg," he whispered.

gasted. "I left the book lying about a day or two ago, and found it on a window ledge in the passage near the dining-hall when I came down this morning."

The hesitating manner in which the explanation was given led Mr. Shore to regard it as invented on the spur of the moment.

"You admit that the book is yours," he snapped. "If Heal didn't lend you these sums you must have taken them out of his locker."

"I never did anything of the kind, sir," protested Langton.

Mr. Shore frowned, then held up *The Pirate's Ghost* in view of the whole class.

"What boy had this book last night?" he asked.

There was no reply. For just a moment Metching was inclined to take his courage in both hands, and own up in an honest and straightforward manner; then it suddenly struck him that it meant being convicted of more than one offence. He would have to explain how he had returned the sheet of sums to Heal's locker, and that would mean admitting that he had been wandering about downstairs during the night.

"I can't do that," he pondered. "Besides, they can't prove it was Langton's doing, so he's bound to get off in the end."

Mr. Shore waited a few moments for an answer to his questions, then tossed the book down on his desk.

"Once again, Heal, did you lend these sums to any one?"

"No, sir."

"Then they were taken from your locker without your knowledge, and, since they were found inside this book——"

"I never touched them; I've told you that already," interrupted Langton.

"Don't speak to me like that, sir," cried Mr. Shore. "Very well, Langton; I shall report this matter to the Head Master, and ask him to deal with it. You'd better be prepared to go to his study after dinner."

"But I'm playing in the Cock Dormitory match this afternoon, sir."

"Oh, I can't help that. Your team must play their waiting man. Go back to your seat."

Langton could take hard knocks on the playing field without wincing, but tears of rage and indignation welled up into his eyes. Through no fault of his own he was landed in this mess, and it might be difficult for him to prove his innocence. There would be a long interview in the Head Master's study, and he would lose his place in the dormitory eleven.

"What rot!" he growled inwardly. "If Heal put that paper in his locker last night, and found it there this morning, it couldn't have been lying about inside that book. Shore must have been dreaming, but the Head is sure to believe all he says."

Only one boy in the room could have explained the mystery, but Metching had held his tongue when he might have spoken. Now his heart was hardened, and his own safety was his chief concern. No one could possibly prove it was his doing; all he had to do was to keep his mouth shut.

Slowly the last hour of morning school dragged away; Mr. Shore demonstrated a new rule on the blackboard, and the class fell to work on a set of examples. There was a long period of silence, broken only by the scratching of pens. Metching glanced at his watch, and was relieved to find that in ten minutes the bell would ring for dismissal. He was safe enough; no one could——

"Metching, I want to speak to you," called out Mr. Shore. "Just step this way."

Metching obeyed the summons. He did his utmost to appear unconcerned as he walked up the room, but he guessed intuitively that he was "in the soup," and his brain was in a whirl of fear and astonishment.

"Now just look at this," began Mr. Shore, picking up two papers from the pile before him. "I've just been correcting this work, and you'll notice that the symbols used in this first sum are x and y . But, at the end of the working, Heal must have got some vague idea into his head that he had been using a and b , and instead of giving the answer $2x - y$ he has put it down $2x - b$. It's not exactly a mistake; I can see it was a slip of the pen."

There was a pause as the speaker laid aside one paper, and picked up another. The deep silence which had fallen on the room told that over twenty pairs of ears were drinking in every word.

"But," continued the master, "it's quite unlikely that two boys will make the same curious slip, and in exactly the same place. Here, in your paper, I find the answer to the first example given as $2x - b$, and for that there can only be

one possible explanation. You copied these sums from Heal's."

Metching's face flushed crimson. He knew that he was "clean bowled," and he had sufficient sense to realise that it would be worse than useless to deny the charge.

"I—I'm sorry, sir," he stammered. "But—but I didn't take that paper out of Heal's locker——"

"You copied the sums," interrupted

Mr. Shore tartly. "What is still worse, you held your tongue--allowed me to blame Langton. Come to me when the school is dismissed."

All the afternoon Metching remained indoors a prisoner at his desk, while, on the playing-field, after a memorable contest, C won the Cock Dormitory match. Langton was in great form; he piled up over 40 runs, and carried his bat.



TOD DIXON, senior prefect of Harley University School, bowling for the second eleven, had sent in a sinuous googly with the skill of a conjurer. Jack Howard, captain of the school, batting for its first eleven, slammed the ball over his left shoulder to where the field was weakest. It curved to within three feet of long-stop, otherwise little Will Tilden. An expert fielder could have palmed the ball securely. Tilden instinctively drew back, as though to avoid danger; then grabbed at the ball, and let it escape his fingers.

"Play the game, White-Feather!"

Dixon spoke his reprimand in angry derision. Tilden limped after the receding leather, revealing the fact that he was lame. Howard, grinning good-humouredly, made six runs before the ball reached the wicket-keeper. Then he tossed his bat in the air.

"That gives us the game," he said.

Dixon snorted his disgust.

"It's through Dayne being on the sick list, and my putting that little duffer on as long-stop," he commented.

"He's only fit to play the *pyanner*," put in another senior jeeringly. "Say, Tilden, why didn't you go to a girl's school?"

"Because girls play hockey, and Tilly darling might have had his shins hurt," Dixon sneered.

Howard gave a glance at Tilden's face. It looked rather pale and drawn, and in his eyes there was something of dumb suffering.

"Stop ragging," came from Howard sharply. And then—"It's going to rain. Draw stumps."

"Hallo—what's up?" Dixon queried, as a rural police constable walked up to the gate of the playing field.

"Have any of you young gents seen a

strange-looking man passing along the road?" the officer asked. He went on explanatorily: "A lunatic, named Gaspin, has escaped from Erton Asylum, and is wandering round somewhere. They say he got into the asylum kitchen, and made off with a carving knife. He's a homicidal maniac, and his weakness is killing children. Used to be a professional strong man, so he's a lively sort of customer to be at large."

The boys had by now gathered about the gate.

"When did he escape?" Howard asked.

"About three hours ago. Clever chap, too, when he's not in one of his fits. Plays the piano."

A babel of comments broke out.

"If we see him, he'll have a rough time," Dixon said, swinging a stump.

The constable snorted.

"If you see him, just go to the constabulary station, and say where," he advised severely. "Don't you young gents try experiments with those cricket stumps. Gaspin is the sort of chap to murder half a dozen of you in fewer minutes. There was only one thing that could quiet him in the asylum, and that was moosic. Well, so long, gents!"

The rain was coming down now.

"Let's go back by the quarry road," Dixon suggested.

"Yes, it'll be the shorter way," Howard agreed.

Tilden spoke up: "Please, Howard, don't go past the quarry. They say the lip is crumbling, and——"

Dixon swung round, and seized Tilden by one ear.

"You need taking to pieces, and being made up again, with more pluck, you

little coward!" he said. "The quarry lip is all right; it's your own lip that's all wrong. What you are afraid of is meeting Gaspin. Well, I hope we ~~will~~ meet him. Come on, Howard, and you fellows."

To make clear what follows it must be explained that the "road" mentioned was a cart-track leading across the fields from one highway to another. It skirted the mouth of a now disused quarry, and the entry to the track had been boarded up.

"Race you!" said Howard.

The cricketers broke into a run. Tilden remained alone. Dixon, turning his head, saw him standing there.

"White-feather!" he called jeeringly.

"Let the kid alone!" growled Howard.

Dixon was easily the best runner in the school. The very timidity of Tilden made him desirous of showing his own contempt of danger. He was first at the boarding, leaped, seized its top edge, and went over with a half-vault.

Howard was close upon the prefect's heels, but as he mounted the boarding there came to his ears a half-stifled cry, and the sound of falling earth; and then his gaze took in the figure of Dixon, grasping with futile efforts at the crumbling quarry lip, while his body hung over the almost cliff-like side of the excavation.

"Keep back, there!" came from Howard.

Those who were behind saw him cautiously lower himself to the other side of the boarding. Then came his shouted "Help!" and a couple of the senior boys, having clambered over, found the school-captain gripping Dixon's wrists, and trying to pull him to the more level ground. Then it was that the warning Tilden had spoken came home to them: the quarry

lip had indeed broken away, carrying nearly all the width of the track.

"The kid was right, after all!" said Howard, when he and his companions had again reached the main road.

"Right or not—he's a little coward!" Dixon exclaimed.

The party returned to the school drenched, and some half-dozen of them clay-bedaubed.

They found two of the asylum officials at the main doorway in talk with the Head, Dr. Arnold.

At sight of the boys, the doctor turned to them with a query as to whether they had seen the missing man.

Howard answered in the negative.

"He's been seen in the neighbourhood by half a dozen people," one of the officials said. "Somehow, he has managed to disappear. Keep a sharp look-out, for he is dangerous."

The boys went in to tea. By tacit agreement they said nothing as to the quarry incident. Being Saturday, they escaped their usual evening "prep." and settled down for two hours' recreation.

This was in the common-room. Tilden had rather dreaded these two hours. So long as the masters were present the chaffing would be mild; but with their absence would come the sort of attack that Dixon always encouraged, and took a delight in leading.

Somewhat to Tilden's surprise, such chaffing as there was came only from boys of his own age.

"Brought your wool-work, Tilly?" asked one.

A door opened, and Mrs. Arnold, wife of the Head, looked in.

"Has little Dorrie been here?" she asked.

Tilden was near to the doorway.

"No, ma'am," he answered. And then: "Shall I try to find her for you?"

"Do, please. The maids are at their tea."

Tilden went out, followed by the derisive grins, and muttered criticisms of the other boys. One of them, taking advantage of the fact that Mrs. Arnold was now out of hearing, called aloud: "Nursemaid!"

British youth is not wilfully cruel. But youth, the wide world over, is rather too ready to label its fellows, and believe the label incapable of lying. Tilden was physically unable to take a very active part in the school sports and games. His incapacity had thrown him back largely on music; and this, joined to an intense sensitiveness, had earned for him thoughtless contempt.

Harley School-house was a huge, rambling building that had been at one time the manor house of a large estate. Tilden, making his way limpingly along one corridor, heard the bounding of a ball in a corridor above. Mounting the stairs with a cheery laugh, he called: "Dorrie!"

A mischievous face peered at him from between balustrades; it was that of a child of two.

"Your mamma wants you," called Tilden.

The child's only answer was a laugh. She scampered away. Tilden followed, rather vexedly, for he knew that the wilful little lady might lead him a dance over the building before allowing herself to be caught.

But relief came as he saw her turn into a large, galleried chamber known as the music-room. Miss Dorrie ran to the far end of the apartment, where, at some

little distance from the wall, a piano stood. Behind this she hid, thrust her head round one corner, and called—"Bo!"

Tilden seated himself on the music-stool. He knew that the best way to catch Miss Dorrie was to ignore her. He fingered the keys lightly, and the child, coming from her hiding-place, began to throw her ball, and scamper after it. Tilden turned his head, rather impatiently, and then, for a moment, he choked.

A huge casement, heavily curtained, stood between the piano and the doorway, and, from between the folds of the divided curtain there peered a wild face, with glaring eyes, while, partly hidden by the curtain, there showed a hand, clenching a long knife.

The escaped madman was in hiding here!

To reach the doorway without passing that curtain was impossible. But it was at the baby girl only that the madman looked. The way lay open to Tilden for his own escape. For a moment he hesitated, and then his pale face set with determination. He would save the child, or die with her. He would not leave her to be killed while he himself went unharmed.

Dorrie knowing nothing of the danger that menaced her, had thrown the ball, and was following it almost to the very edge of the curtain.

Moment by moment Tilden expected to see the blade buried in the child's body. But the madman, with the cunning of the insane, was waiting for Dorrie to approach yet nearer. She was doing so! The horror was coming!

And then, as though flashed to him from Heaven, it came to Tilden that he held

beneath his fingers the one chance of preventing the tragedy that impended.

"Music, Dorrie!" he said in a voice unlike his own; and with that struck into the sublime chords of a great composer.

Above the piano, on the wall, was a slanting mirror, and on this the eyes of Tilden were fastened, for it showed him the face of the madman.

The child came across, and clambered to Tilden's lap. For a moment or two nothing happened. Then there came a step. Tilden, playing a melody that has thrilled millions with its sweetness, saw in the mirror that the maniac, still clasping the knife, had come from his hiding-place, and was fingering the weapon, the while his eyes wandered over himself and the child with an expression of vague wonderment and indecision.

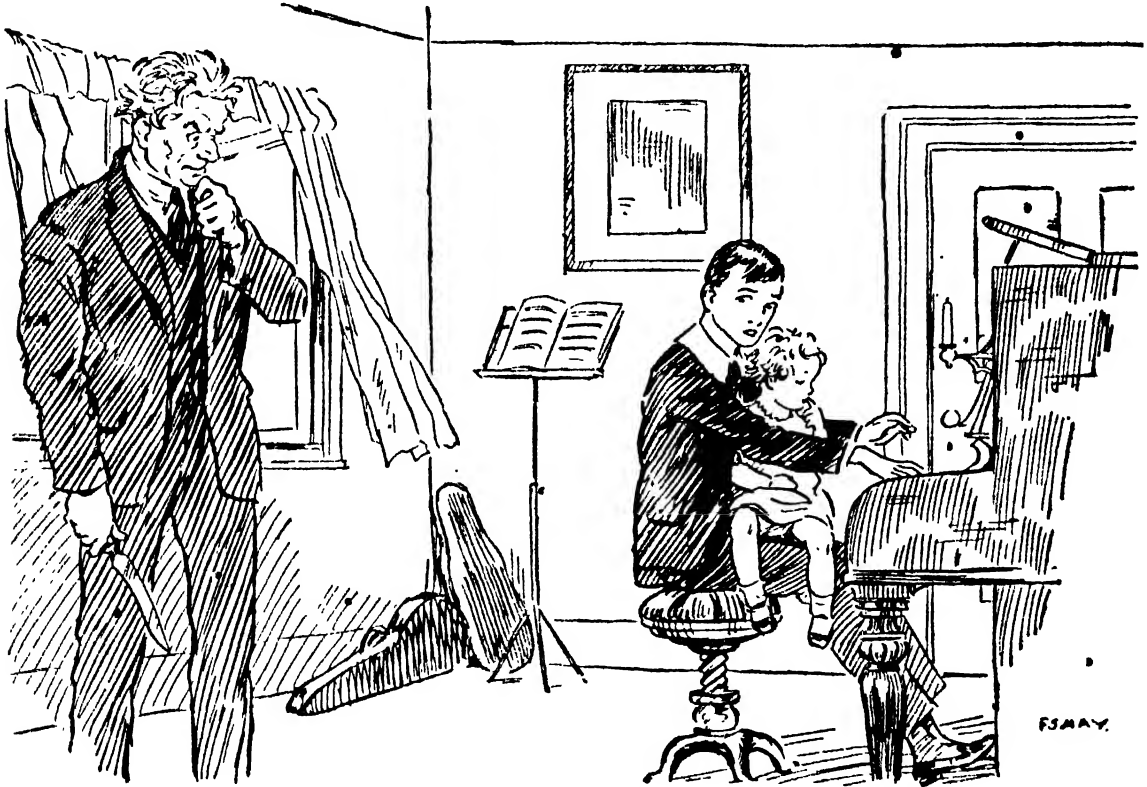
Would help come? Could it come? This chamber was in a remote part of the house. No one would guess that he and Dorrie were here. And, if any one did come, the fact itself might hasten the tragedy that he foresaw.

So ran Tilden's thoughts. Deep in his soul he uttered a prayer, and then, gazing beyond the mirror, he saw a door in the gallery open, and the child's mother, Mrs. Arnold, look down on the scene with terror in her eyes. He saw the gallery door pulled to gently. Then the long seconds crawled. The chords he struck were as a passionate voice of pleading. His heart was throbbing like the steady, heavy beat of a drum. He closed his eyes, but opened them a moment later as a new sound came to him. The room door had opened, revealing four masters, armed with heavy sticks, and followed by Dixon and Howard, the

last carrying a large table-cover over one arm.

The man's back was to them.' He was beating time with the hand that held the knife. The eyes of Tilden met in the mirror those of the Head. Moment crawled upon moment. Six yards remained to be

his other side and closed his eyes, awaiting the blow. Mechanically he struck with one hand a crashing chord whose loudness drowned the involuntary cry from the lips of Howard as he leaped and threw the blinding table-cover over the man's head. Within a space of seconds there was a



His eyes wandered over himself and the child in vague wonderment.

covered by the rescuers. Scarce six feet separated Tilden from the madman. • Inch by inch, with the silence of shadows, the rescuers advanced. The child struggled to get down. Tilden restrained her. Her struggles appeared to arouse the man's wrath, for he raised his knife and moved forward. Tilden thrust the baby girl to

swaying, struggling mass of humanity, which presently parted, to show upon the floor the body of the stranger bound hand and foot.

And then only did any one think of little Tilden. He, too, lay on the floor, to which he had slipped in a dead faint.

Dixon broke into a loud sob, and knelt by him.

"Tilden!" he said chokingly—"Tilly, old chap!" and upon that, as the younger boy opened his eyes, raised him in his arms, with the tenderness of a brother, careless as to who saw the tears that were streaming down his cheeks.

It was when the commotion and excitement had subsided, when the asylum officials had removed the madman to where he would be safely guarded, and when the boys had gone to the vast dormitory that they shared in common, that Dixon, standing before them all, made a speech:—

"I say you fellows—every one of you," he began, with a husky catch in his throat,

"I want you to hear me beg Tilden's pardon. I do beg it here and now. I said he was a coward. It was a lie. He is the pluckiest chap in the school."

Dixon held out his hand, but so did a score or two of other boys; and little Tilden, half-crying, and blushing nervously, bundled into bed.

But a week later he had to "face the music," for then, in the common room, the Head, in the presence of many big-wig visitors, and all the school, presented the boy with a gold watch, with this inscription on the inside of the case:—

"Harley University School.—From the masters and pupils to William Tilden, as an appreciation of courage and resourcefulness in the face of danger."



BELLINGTON'S BUCCANEER

Robert Leighton



A PAIR of the best kippers, a tin of condensed milk, a pot of marmalade, and half a pound of squashed-fly biscuits," I demanded, having elbowed my way to the counter of the tuck shop, where a squad of other fags and Lower School boys were crowded, eager to be served.

"For yourself, Frisby?" Mother Hunnisett questioned, looking for signs of payment.

"No," I answered, "they're for my fagmaster. Put 'em down to Bellington's account. And look smart, please. I've got to grill those kippers for his tea."

Mrs. Hunnisett stared at me sullenly.

"I've 'alf a mind not to serve you, Frisby," she demurred, beginning to collect the things all the same. "That young gentleman's account it's gettin', too big, and I ain't goin' to give 'im no more

credit, see? Two pound five shillings and threepence that boy owes me up to date, countin' what he left over from last term. Think of it! You can tell 'im from me, Frisby, that if he don't pay me before next Monday, I shall send in my bill to 'is people, and teach 'im a lesson."

She wrapped the greasy kippers in newspaper and handed them across to me with the other provisions. Tucking them in the crook of my arm. I went farther into the shop to the postal desk to buy a stamp. As I did so, I stumbled over the outstretched feet of a strange, foreign-looking man who sat on the bench opposite the counter, loading a black clay pipe with equally black tobacco. Seafaring strangers often came into Mother Hunnisett's for rest or refreshment, as there was no other place of entertainment in the village. This man couldn't be mistaken for

anything else than a seafarer. He had even brought the flavour of tar rope into the shop. I detected it above the usual miscellaneous smells of groceries, cheese, and rancid bacon. The backs of his coarse hands were covered with indigo designs.

"Sorry," I apologised, going beyond him.

He was standing lighting his pipe and barring my passage when I returned towards the door. He was tall, powerfully built, and very dark, with a full black beard. His clothing seemed to me unnecessarily thick and heavy for a hot summer afternoon. I reflected that perhaps he had been accustomed to a tropical climate. The flame from his lighted match shone into his bronzed face. An evil-looking face. I almost shrank back in instinctive fear at sight of it.

Never before had I seen a man who so completely fulfilled my idea of a pirate. He only needed a red handkerchief tied round his head, and a brace of pistols in his belt, and he might have passed for a genuine rover. His nose was out of shape, and from his shifty left eye back to his crumpled ear there was an unsightly old wound like the healed-up slash of a cutlass. But the most appalling thing about his face was a curious geometrical design in the middle of his left cheek. I was gazing upon it when he turned to dispose of his dead match, allowing me room to pass.

Hardly had I got to the doorstep, when the man's heavy brown hand was laid on my shoulder with such a grip that I nearly dropped my fagmaster's precious pot of marmalade.

"Excuse me," he said in a pleading tone which made me think he had the intention of snatching the kippers from my possession, "excuse me—"

"What do you want?" I cried, drawing back from him, annoyed, and a bit frightened.

He removed his pipe, puffing out an enormous cloud of strong tobacco smoke which made me cough.

"Tell me," he went on, "what was the name that you gave just now over the counter—the name of your fagmaster? Was it Wellington?"

"No," I answered, "I said Bellington. What's it got to do with you what name I said?"

"Bellington?" he repeated. "Yes, I thought that was it. Not a very common name, eh? What's his first name—William?"

I did not answer at once, but gave attention to my parcels.

"No," I said, "it isn't William. If you want to find out, you'd better inquire at the school. Or—here's our Head Master coming along the street—go and ask him."

He laughed, throwing back his head, and I saw that his teeth, although evidently sound, were almost black, like polished ebony. His face was now turned to the sunlight. It was almost copper-coloured; but the under part of his nose, where the sun had not caught it, was nearly white. There was nothing foreign in his way of speaking, and yet he certainly did not look like a civilised Englishman.

"Where's his home?" he pursued, bending forward and looking searchingly into my eyes. "Do you know? Where does he live when he's at home?"

I now realised that the curious mark on his left cheek was repeated in reverse on the right. It was in the form of a volute, the curling lines being raised slightly

above the natural surface of the sunburnt skin.

"Yes, I know," I answered, "but I'm not going to tell you." And I broke away from him and hurried back to school.

At the gate I turned to see if the stranger had transferred his questioning to Dr. Merrivale, but he stood where I had left him, while the Head was approaching on the other side of the street, followed at no great distance by several Sixth Form boys, amongst whom was Bellington himself, with his cricket bat under his arm.

A little later the doctor stopped me on my way to call-over.

"Frisby," he said in his sweetest manner, "I don't think I quite like to see any of the boys talking with casual strangers. There are many undesirable ruffians in the neighbourhood, and the man who spoke to you just now looked an absolute reprobate."

"He was asking me things about the school, sir," I responded, "and I referred him to you."

"Quite right, Frisby; quite right," he nodded; "you can't be too careful."

I did not mention the strange man to my fagmaster that evening. Bellington was swotting for an exam., and I saw no reason for disturbing him with a matter so unimportant. He was a school prefect and captain of the First Eleven, and I had the juvenile idea that everybody, outside and inside of Waveney School, was interested in him.

But I did not cease to think of the curious stranger himself. Something about him excited my boyish interest. It seemed to me certain that he must have gone through heaps of extraordinary adventures. I believed that he was really what I had

at first taken him to be—a pirate; and I was fearfully interested in pirates, mutineers, beachcombers, blackbirders, and all those rascally adventurers of the tropic seas that one reads about, but never encounters in the flesh.

I had supposed that the man had gone on his way to the nearest seaport, and that all I should ever know of him would be summed up in the haunting memory of his fearsome, tattooed face; and I was accordingly not a little surprised on the following morning to see him once again. This time it was in the school precincts, in the cloisters, where the school notices were displayed. He stood carefully studying these, and of course I knew that Bellington's name figured largely at the head of more than one of the examination lists. Was the man searching for that name? Why was it, I wondered, that he had asked me where Bellington lived? I could not help thinking that he wanted to do my fagmaster some harm, or that perhaps he was on the track of some relatives of Bellington's, and aimed at getting at them by this roundabout means to fulfil some awful mission of vengeance.

That was a Saturday, and in the afternoon there was a big match between our first eleven and an eleven from Haddisthorpe. I stood under the trees, with a few of my special chums, watching the game. The visiting eleven were taking their second innings and the score was in their favour. But Bellington was now bowling, and he had taken two wickets in half a dozen overs. He was in splendid form.

"Bellington's doing awfully well!" exclaimed Popstake at my side. "We'll beat them yet if he keeps on."

"Oh! well done, Bellington!" I shouted when yet another wicket went down.

"Which is Bellington?" said a voice from behind me. And a hand was laid lightly on my shoulder.

"That's him bowling," I answered impulsively, without looking round. The umpire was being appealed to. I was excited.

"Thank you," came the same voice as the hand was withdrawn. "I shall know him again."

I turned sharply then. We all turned, and looked into the inscrutable face of the tattooed stranger. His eyes were fixed upon my fagmaster, who stood in full view on the pitch, rolling his sleeves higher up his arms and looking splendidly handsome in the bright sunlight with his white flannels and blue cap.

"Yes, I shall know him again," the man repeated, nodding his head with curious determination as he swung round on his heel and walked away. He was dressed now in a shabby suit of blue serge, wore a soft felt hat, and looked rather less like a weather-beaten seaman.

"Who on earth is that queer johnnie?" questioned Copestake. "I never saw him before."

"Looks like a buccaneer out of a story book," suggested Thwaits. "Did you twig that funny mark on his cheek? It was a sort of brand mark. They used to brand martyrs on the cheeks."

"That chap's more like a murderer than a martyr, though," added Monkton. "He made on me the impression of a barbarian savage. But 'buccaneer' fits him. I can fancy him, bristling with pistols and cutlasses, standing at the quarter rail and ordering his captives to walk

the plank. Hallo! that's a good hit to boundary!"

The Haddisthorpe stalwarts seemed to have got the trick of Bellington's unvarying delivery, and had begun to turn it to their advantage. Their score went up and up, and in the end they won the match with fifty runs to the good.

That same evening, when I went to the tuck shop, I said to Mrs. Hunnisett:—

"I told Bellington about your account, Mrs. Hunnisett."

"Oh, that's all right, Frisby," she smiled amiably; "it's been paid, with a extra two pound for 'im to draw on to the end of term."

This information puzzled me. I knew that Bellington was awfully hard up for pocket money, and he had more than once spoken in my hearing about his people at home being frightfully poor since the war. Indeed, when I had told him of Mother Hunnisett's threat he had complained ruefully that he didn't know where the payment was to come from. And yet I had been told that the payment had been made! I suspected that he had borrowed the money rather than run the risk of his people being troubled by his school debts. It did not occur to me that he would never have paid more than the bare amount that was owing—unless he wanted Mother Hunnisett to act as his temporary banker. But all this was no business of mine, and I understood my position as his fag, too well to venture to question him concerning his private affairs.

It was my position as his fag, coupled with my profound respect for him as one of the head boys in the school, which kept me from approaching Bellington with anything like familiarity, and it was

not until the Sunday, after chapel, that I mentioned the mysterious stranger.

I followed close behind Bellington as we were marching out. When we reached the crowded porch there was a bit of a block. Some lady visitors were getting into a waiting motor-car. During the halt I

upon him, for he met them with his own proud and dignified glance. Then I felt him shrink away as from something that he had cause to fear, and his exit was hurried.

"Who was that grim-looking individual staring at me in the porch, Frisby?" he asked, when we were outside. "Do



'Paying me a surprise visit, eh?' said the buccaneer.

glanced aside, and in the shadow behind the door I saw again the man with the tattooed face. He was craning forward, and his glistening eyes were fixed in a concentrated gaze upon Bellington. It seemed to me that there was pent-up enmity behind them. Bellington must have been conscious that the eyes were

you know? Have you ever seen him before?"

"I don't know who or what he is," I answered, falling into stride with my fag-master, "but I've seen him before. He's been hanging around for days past. He has spoken to me twice, and each time about you. He asked me your Christian

name, and wanted to know where you live. He was watching you in the cricket match. He is dogging you, Bellington. I believe he intends to do you some injury; and he looks a most awfully wicked customer. Monkton described him as a buccaneer, and I agree with Monkton."

"But I don't know any buccaneer, and no buccaneer knows me," protested Bellington with an amused smile.

"All the same, I hope you'll be on your guard against this ruffian," I recommended. "It seems to me he's loitering round to drop on you when he catches you alone some time. If he had any proper reason for speaking to you, he could easily ask to see you. Why doesn't he? Because he's working in secret; if not on his own account, then as the agent of some one else who owes you or one of your family a grudge."

Bellington grew suddenly serious.

"Do you mean to suggest a vendetta?" he asked. "Do you mean that this—this buccaneer as you call him—may be on my track to take vengeance on me for something that one of my remote forefathers may have done?"

"Something of that sort," I acknowledged. "In your place I should go about armed with a loaded revolver, or claim police protection."

"My dear Frisby," he laughed, "we are living in the twentieth century, and I'm not afraid of any buccaneer that ever trod a ship's deck. In fact, I'd jolly well like to meet one. No. There aren't any such interesting people, these days. We had a gardener once at Cotton Hall whom I used to name 'The Pirate.' I expect this may be the same man, wanting to

beg help. But I've no money to give him, worse luck."

"Was he tattooed?" I asked.

"Yes. 'He'd an anchor on his arm."

"Then it isn't the same," I assured him, "for the chap that's tracking you is tattooed like a South Sea Islander, including his face. And he isn't within miles of looking like a civilised gardener."

One of Bellington's pet hobbies was fishing, and on the first half-holiday in the next week he asked me to accompany him to his favourite reach of Wavency Broad.

We took one of the school boats, he pulling and I steering.

"We can get bait at the old eel-catcher's hut," he decided. "It's a bad day for fishing, but it's a nice change from so much cricket, and I don't much care whether we land anything or not."

The eel-catcher's hut was a stranded wherry, converted into a sort of house-boat, and it was hardly a mile from our starting place. The current was with us, and we were not long in coming abreast of it.

"Tuttle seems to have a visitor," I said. "There's rather a swagger boat warped alongside his landing-step. Some one else wanting bait, perhaps."

We pulled in to the gangway and called aloud for Tuttle. But he did not answer. Instead of the old eel-catcher, a very different person appeared in the open doorway. Bellington drew back at sight of him and caught at an oar as if to shove off again.

"Paying me a surprise visit, eh?" said the buccaneer in unexpectedly cheery welcome. "How d'ye do—er—Bellington? And you too, Frisby? Come inside and tell me how you discovered my address.

I didn't count on anybody getting on my track. What!" he added, seeing that we both hesitated, "you refuse my civil invitation? But of course—I should have understood. Well, then, my name is Magnolia—Captain Magnolia. Ever seen a magnolia before, Mr. Bellington?"

"In the shape of a tropical flower, yes," returned Bellington. "You look as if you knew something of the tropics yourself, governor. I won't ask you for your true name."

"That's kind of you," nodded Magnolia. "I admit I used to have another. Lend me your hand and let me give you a pull up."

I was surprised to see Bellington's readiness in accepting the invitation. I climbed up behind him and presently we found ourselves seated in a wonderfully comfortable cabin, furnished like a room and decorated with curtains. Tuttle had evidently sub-let his stranded wherry.

"Is this your home, sir?" Bellington inquired, glancing round with curiosity. Out of politeness he avoided looking into the buccaneer's scarred face.

"Yes; for the present," came the reply. "Where is yours?"

"Mine?" said Bellington; "a place called Gunton Hall, in Norfolk."

"Ah," ruminated Captain Magnolia, "sounds pretty high-class. Deer park, motor-cars, and a crowd of servants, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," returned Bellington. "It's only a tiny place, really; and we've no servants to speak of—not since the war, when father was killed. And then, after the death of Sir Felix——"

He broke off. I had trod on his toe under the table, to caution him not to be so

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free with his information. But he was reckless.

"Sir Felix?" repeated the buccaneer; "an elder brother, I suppose?"

"No," Bellington went on, "I have no brother. I was referring to my grandfather, Sir Felix Bellington. He was a baronet."

"Oh, I see," nodded Magnolia. "Then, in that case—you having neither brother nor father, and your grandfather being dead—you are yourself the baronet. You are Sir—Sir—what is your name?"

"My name is Eric," explained Bellington. "But I am not the baronet. The title went to my Uncle David, who lives abroad. He's been abroad for years. But we're expecting him home, soon."

A curious light flashed into the buccaneer's eyes.

"This is interesting," he said, "very interesting. And so Dave Bellington is a baronet, is he? Well, all I can say is, he doesn't deserve to be anything of the kind."

"You don't know him!" cried Bellington, leaning eagerly forward.

Captain Magnolia nodded, and was silent for many moments.

"He is my deadliest enemy," he then muttered between his blackened teeth. "He is nothing but a low-down vagabond, a beachcomber, a slave-dealer, a bully—yes, even a criminal. He is not fit to breathe the same air as a decent Englishman."

"You lying scoundrel!" cried Bellington, seizing a tobacco jar as if to throw it at the buccaneer's head, "I'd have you know that my uncle David is a gentleman. How dare you say a word against him!"

Magnolia gave a mocking laugh.

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"You can call me what you like," he sneered; "I admit I'm a scoundrel, and I suppose I look the part. But I'm not a blacker one than your precious uncle. I know him better than you do: a great deal better. I could tell you things about this Sir David Bellington that would make your hair change its colour. And you're letting a bla'guard like him stand between you and an honourable title! He'd be a disgrace to you, Bellington. If you were to see him and know him as he is, you wouldn't own him as a relation."

My fagmaster smiled derisively. He pushed the tobacco jar farther away from him on the flap table, and stood with his hands in his trousers pockets, facing the man who presumed to malign his uncle.

"Look here, governor," he said calmly, "you've been in this neighborhood spying on me these few days, what is it you want? What's your game?"

"Oh, don't alarm yourself," returned Magnolia, "you've nothing to fear. I've got everything I came for—everything. And I never asked you for this interview, remember. It will be our last. When you've gone out of this cabin you shall never see me again."

"Then the sooner I go the better," retorted Bellington, drawing me away with him.

"Any message for your Uncle David?" asked the buccancer, watching us getting into our boat.

"If I could trust the messenger," said Bellington, "I would send him my love."

"Well, that's worth something," I heard Magnolia murmur as he disappeared.

We never saw him again, and he remained a mystery. But a week or two later Bellington received a lawyer's letter addressed to Sir Eric Bellington, Baronet, informing him that his Uncle David had died, leaving him a fortune of something like fifty thousand pounds. It was stated that the deceased baronet had been killed in a motor accident in London "immediately after his secret visit to Waveney." Enclosed with the letter was his photograph. Bellington showed it to me, and I was amazed.

"Why," I exclaimed, "this is your buccancer!"

"Yes," he nodded sadly. "He was ashamed of himself—ashamed to show his face among decent people. And he came here to discover what sort of a fellow I might be. And I called him a scoundrel!"

"But you sent him your love, Bellington," I reminded him, "and I think he was grateful."

Battling Bill

By C. BERNARD RUTLEY

HE was a mild looking, rather insignificant little man, and parents always expressed surprise when he was first pointed out to them by admiring boys. Yet "Battling Bill" he was, the most popular and respected master at Avonhill College.

It came about in this manner. It was the beginning of the autumn term, and the Upper Fourth—the "Prize Show" as it was vulgarly called by the rest of the school, owing to the pronounced predominance of brawn and muscle over brains in its scholars—were assembled in their classroom awaiting the advent of their new form master.

Pandemonium reigned. Grigson, a hefty youth of sixteen, was engaged in pummeling Smith minor to an accompaniment of "Yah, you great fat brute! O—h, leave off, you cad, you're hurting!" The south and north sides of the room were engaged in a desperate conflict with paper darts, whilst in one secluded corner a trio of voices was intoning, "His name is Billotson, B-i-double l-o-t-s-o-n, Bill-ot-son."

"Poor little beggar!" said Jervis of the Sixth, as the sounds of strife and mirth floated down the corridor. "Fancy asking him to take the 'Prize Show'—prize menagerie more like. The young fools," as

a burst of cheering broke out, "the Head will hear them!" and turning down the corridor he opened the classroom door and looked in.

It says something for Jervis that even the "Prize Show" fell silent at his sudden appearance. "You're a fine lot!" he said. "Stop that heathenish row in the corner; can't you give the new man a chance? Get up, Grigson, and leave young Smith alone! If I hear any more of this row I'll give every man Jack of you a hundred lines!"

So it was that when Mr. Billotson arrived a few minutes later, accompanied by the Head, he was pleasurably struck with the quietness and order of his new class.

The Head introduced him with the usual formula. "This is Mr. Billotson, boys. He comes to us with a great reputation, and I hope you will assist him by showing application and interest in your studies." He then sniffed, as much as to say, "That's what I think of your application and interest," and left Mr. Billotson to his own devices.

"I greet you, Mr. Billotson!" said Buller, the form wag, rising and bowing to the new master. "On behalf of the gentlemen of the Upper Fourth, I greet you!"

"He greets you! We all greet you, Mr. Bill-ot-son," intoned the rest of the class.

The little man blinked his eyes. "I thank you very much," he said. "It is history this hour, I believe?"

"You are correct in your belief, Mr.—er—Billowson," answered Buller. "We are doing the reign of that—that—"

"Martyred," suggested Grigson.

"Martyred. Ah, thank you, Mr. Grigson! That martyred monarch, Charles I. Perhaps you do not consider him a martyr, Mr. Billowson? I think, however, that I am voicing the sentiments of the other gentlemen present by——"

"Thank you very much, my boy, but before we go any further I should like to know who's who. By the way, my name is Billotson, not Billowson."

"Of course, sir," answered Buller. "I am Buller, Mr. Billotson, William Ewart Buller, unrelated, I regret to say, to either the late Mr. Gladstone or to the late General Sir Redvers Buller. How do you do, Mr. Billotson? I am pleased to meet you, sir," and rising from his desk Buller advanced to the platform and gravely shook the dazed master by the hand.

"This is Mr. Grigson, sir," continued Buller, as the youth in question stepped forward. "Mr. Grigson—Mr. Billotson. I trust you will be friends. To his intimates, Mr. Billotson, he is known as 'Griggles.' An unpleasing name, but, as you will have noticed, singularly adapted to his unpleasing countenance."

"I'll 'punch your head for that!" muttered Grigson.

"Next, please," said Buller serenely. "Ah, Mr. Mortimer. Shake Mr. Billotson's hand, Mr. Mortimer," and so he went on until the whole of the twenty boys had shaken hands with their new master.

When they were all in their places again

Buller stood up and said, "Now that we know each other better, Mr. Billotson, perhaps you will permit me to continue my remarks on Charles the Martyr?"

"No, I won't!" snapped the little man. "I wish to make some remarks myself."

"But I was only going to say, sir," persisted Buller in a pained voice.

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Billotson.

"Certainly, sir. Silence, gentlemen of the Upper Fourth, Mr. Billotson is about to address you."

A silence that could almost be felt fell upon the form, and twenty pairs of eyes were fixed steadily and unblinkingly upon the rattled master.

Mr. Billotson fumbled with his watch chain. This was so very different from the class of little boys he had taken in his late preparatory school. He supposed this was ragging, but how was he to take it? It was all done so politely; and then, of course, he made a false move.

"I don't know whether you always greet your new masters in this way, but——"

"Always, sir," interposed Buller, whilst the rest of the form maintained a dead silence. The Upper Fourth were past masters in the art of scientific ragging, and at present they were quite willing to leave the field to Buller.

"Well, I suppose it is all right, but to me it seems most irregular. However, let us proceed with the lesson."

For a few minutes Mr. Billotson discoursed on the reign of Charles I., and then, when he paused for a moment, the form broke in with a round of clapping.

"A most—if I may say so—a most——"

"Masterly," suggested Grigson.

"I thank you, Mr. Grigson. A most

masterly exposition, Mr. Billotson," said Buller. "Your explanation of Charles's attitude towards Cromwell has settled a point I have long debated with my friend, Mr. MacGregor, the red-haired gentleman in the corner, Mr——"

"Silence!" cried the master, very red in the face. "What have you got there, Grigson?"

"Mc, sir? Oh, I am just drawing a picture of Charles having his head cut off."

"But this is not a drawing lesson, my good boy."

"No, sir. Oh, sir, of course you don't know! Our late master, Mr. Hugh Thorn-dyke Smithers, always liked us to draw during our history lessons. He said it impressed the facts upon our debilitated brains. Please, sir, what does 'debilitated' mean?" inquired Grigson innocently.

"Ah, yes, of course—debilitated—yes, yes, let us continue the lesson."

But at that moment the bell sounded, and with one accord the whole form sprang to their feet, and lined up, two deep, in front of the master's desk. "Good-morning, Mr. Billotson," said Buller. "Good-morning, Mr. Bill-ot-son," chimed in the rest of the class. "Form, left turn, quick march!" cried Buller, and before the dazed man could interfere the whole class had marched out of the door.

"Poor beggar," said Jervis to Menzies, a fellow prefect, that evening. "Did you hear how that young swipe Buller introduced the whole of the Upper Fourth to him this morning? Jove, I wouldn't be Billotson in Billotson's place! He doesn't know what he's in for."

But Mr. Billotson certainly learned during the next fortnight. His school hours were

made a purgatory for him by quiet, persistent, and scientific ragging.

On one occasion he had been heard to remark that he disliked the scent of eucalyptus. The next morning every boy in the Upper Fourth had a bad cold. Buller, having made a collection, had bought a plentiful supply of eucalyptus oil, and had saturated every boy's handkerchief with the stuff. Having then some oil still left over, he had sprinkled it on the floor, with the result that the classroom simply reeked of eucalyptus.

Mr. Billotson's arrival was heralded with a violent blowing of noses, and he had hardly entered the room before he cried out, "Where does this disgusting smell come from? Eucalyptus, faugh! Open the windows at once!"

"Oh, sir, I've got a bad cold!" answered twenty voices, with such a violent shaking of handkerchiefs that waves of eucalyptus scent were wafted across the room towards the master.

"Open the windows at once, I can't stand the stuff!" shouted Mr. Billotson, and then promptly bolted from the room, and was not seen for the rest of the morning. Later it was reported that he had been violently ill.

But the climax was reached on Smith minor's birthday. Grigson conceived the idea that they should celebrate the event during lesson time, and on the day in question every boy turned up in a clean collar and shirt, and best suit and tie. Seeing his class so unusually neat, Mr. Billotson, who had not learned from experience, inquired the reason for the unusual display.

"If you please, sir," said Grigson, "it's Smith minor's birthday, and we thought

that perhaps you 'would not mind us celebrating it a bit. His aged parents are poor, and have to scrape to send their dear boy to school," here he wiped away an imaginary tear, "so we have each brought him a little token of our esteem," and with one accord nineteen parcels of every imaginable shape and size appeared on top of the desks.

"I will allow nothing of the kind!" shouted Mr. Billotson, but he might as well have shouted to the Sphinx. One after the other nineteen boys got up from their desks, and walking across to Smith minor presented him with a parcel, with much shaking of hands, and many congratulations, until his grinning face was hidden behind the pile of bogus presents.

Mr. Billotson had just sunk back into his chair, very white, and with a curious glint in his eyes, when the door opened, and Tony, the school porter, came in. "A telegram for Mr. Smith minor, sir," he said, and then, seeing the position of affairs, promptly disappeared.

"A telegram!" cried Buller, pouncing upon it, and tearing it open. "Congratulations, Smith, old chap, a thousand congratulations! Listen to this. 'You have been left one hundred thousand pounds by Uncle Reg.—Aunt Jane.'" After that nineteen boys must needs shake hands with Smith all over again, and congratulate him in sonorous sentences.

"Priceless!" said Grigson ecstatically in the dormitory that night. "Absolutely priceless! That telegram of yours, Bulley, old man, was a masterpiece!" Then, the Upper Fourth went to sleep, little dreaming what the morrow was to bring forth.

The third hour of the next morning the Upper Fourth took gym. It was one of

the few things, besides ragging, they were good at. The sergeant was a martinet, and stood no nonsense, and they had just donned their flannels when the door opened, and Mr. Billotson appeared, dressed in flannel trousers and a white sweater.

"Everything ready, sergeant?" he asked. "All right, thanks! Come back at the end of the hour. If we want you sooner I'll send one of the boys."

"Right you are, sir!" and so saying the sergeant left the gymnasium.

"Crums! Old Billot's going to take us in gym," murmured Buller to Grigson. "Oh, crickey, what a lark!"

But events did not quite take the turn Buller anticipated.

Mounting on the spring-board Mr. Billotson began: "I wish to say something to you boys, and I should advise you not to start ragging until I have finished. I have been in this school a fortnight, and during that time I have not conveyed a single item of knowledge into your minds owing to your persistent ragging. Now I am quite willing to admit that, in the usual way, I may not be much good as a schoolmaster, so I am going to adopt a course of my own at which I am some good. I am a small man, and you are all great, hefty boys, so there will not be much difference in size and weight. Over in the corner I see a pile of boxing-gloves. Well, I will take the whole twenty of you on, one after the other."

There was an astounded silence. For once the Upper Fourth had the wind taken out of their sails, and had nothing to say.

"Come along!" cried Mr. Billotson. "You, Grigson. You're a big chap, and I hear you are pretty good with your hands. Come, sir, put on the gloves."

To Grigson's credit be it said he needed no second bidding, and in a few minutes he was facing the little master on a square of fibre matting, whilst the rest of the class looked on in dazed silence.

Then followed an uncomfortable three minutes for Grigson. He was supposed to be quite good at boxing, but he might have been fighting air for all the damage he did to Mr. Billotson. In and out jumped the little master, and each time his left or his right flicked Grigson's nose, jabbed him in the ribs, or came perilously close to his eyes, until the dazed youth knew not what he was doing. Then suddenly the master fainted with his right and brought his left home with a smack on Grigson's jaw, with the result that Grigson promptly sat down.

"Bad, bad!" said Mr. Billotson, as he helped Grigson to his feet. "My good boy, I could have knocked you into the middle of next week any time I liked, and that last blow would have put you out for the count had it been a trifle harder. Next, please."

It was a strangely subdued Upper Fourth, with quite a presentable array of bruises, which the sergeant found awaiting him at the end of the hour. "You look as if you'd been in the wars, my lads," he said. "Bit of all right, Mr. Billotson, ay? Now then, look sharp and dress!"

The next morning Mr. Billotson appeared in class with two pairs of boxing-gloves. "After our little debate yesterday," he began, "I trust we shall get on better than before, but in case any of you gentlemen feel a desire to take a rise out of me, at any time, I have brought a pair of boxing-gloves for your use."

You may think this is the end of the story, but it is not. The end comes four weeks later.

It was the half-term holiday, and Buller, Grigson, and Mortimer had got permission to walk along the coast to the town of Avonmouth, a distance of fifteen miles, there and back. They had begged some sandwiches from the matron, and intended to make a whole day of it. It was a beautiful autumn day, and they thoroughly enjoyed their ramble along the cliffs. Arrived at Avonmouth, they had a look round, ate their sandwiches on the beach, and then started home again about two o'clock in the afternoon.

They had covered about three miles, and were in a very lonely part of the cliffs, when suddenly two big, rough-looking men appeared before them.

"Good-afternoon, young masters," said one of them; "could you give a couple of pore blokes the money to buy a square meal?"

"I'm sorry," answered Buller, "but both my friends and I are out of cash."

"Out of cash; no, never! Well, p'raps you could tell us the time?"

Without thinking, Buller pulled out his watch, a handsome gold hunter given him by his father. "Just three o'clock," he answered.

"Thank you kindly, young master," answered the man who had first spoken, and without another word he and his companion turned up a bypath and disappeared.

"I don't like the look of those chaps," said Mortimer. "You were a mug, Bulley, to show that watch of yours!"

"Sorry!" answered Buller. "Never mind, it's done now. Let's get on; I don't think they'll trouble us."

But half a mile farther on, just as they were entering a small amphitheatre of

rocks with a smooth, grassy bottom, they saw one of the men lounging about at the other side, busy whittling a holly stick with his knife.

The boys hesitated, but "Come on!" said Grigson. "I'm not going to turn back for two great louts."

"Nor I; nor I!" chimed in the other two.

The boys had almost come up with the man in front when they heard a step behind them, and looking round they beheld the second rough, also armed with a short cudgel.

"Ready, Sam?" he cried. "Now then, young masters," he said, flourishing his cudgel. "Sam and I don't wish you no 'arm, but we want your money and them watches o' yourn, and what's more, we mean to 'ave 'em."

"Really!" answered Buller coldly. "Ready, you chaps, all together!" and with one accord the three boys rushed at the man in front.

But the men were ready for them, and soon the boys were conducting an unequal battle with two great men who made no bones about using their cudgels. Matters were beginning to look serious, and Mortimer had just staggered back, dazed by a blow on the forehead, when there was a quick footstep, the sound of a sharp smack, and the bigger of the two roughs went reeling back out of the fray, dropping his cudgel as he did so.

"Look after your man!" cried the voice of Mr. Billotson. "I'll settle this fellow!"

The three boys soon overcame their one opponent, and then, seated on his head and body, they turned to see how their other assailant was faring.

Mr. Billotson had discarded his coat,

and was dancing round his man, who looked to be twice his size, slipping in every now and then to plant a blow on his opponent's body which made the ruffian wince.

But the rough was no novice at the game. He had a longer reach than Mr. Billotson, and again and again the little master went reeling back from a well-directed blow, whilst blood was flowing from a cut over his left eye.

"Shall I help you, sir?" cried Grigson anxiously, as he watched the uneven battle.

"No, dash you! Keep quiet, and don't spoil a man's sport!" cried Mr. Billotson, breaking free from a clinch, and jabbing his left fiercely to his opponent's jaw.

The blow was not hard enough to do much damage, and with a bellow of rage the rough sprang at his opponent.

Then to the boys' dismay they saw that their master was tiring. His guard was drooping, and his knees looked shaky. With a shout of triumph the rough went in, thinking victory his for the taking. But in his confidence he uncovered his point, and in an instant Mr. Billotson had ceased to droop and shake. Out shot his right. Smack it went against his opponent's ill-looking face, forcing his head back. Then crack came his left, perfectly timed, and with all his weight behind it, straight to his opponent's chin, and without a sound the rough measured his length on the grass.

"He said the chap was no fighter," said Buller, recounting the incidents of the afternoon to his form mates that evening. "No fighter! Crickey! What more does our Battling Bill want?"

PODDY THE PREFECT



CHAPTER I

OUT OF BOUNDS

THE boys of Penniton College were coming back from the holidays, and, though it was only just noon, the terrace, the square, and the halls hummed with life.

Amid the general clamour a cab pulled up at Bishop's House, and a well-knit, active youth with firm chin and adventurous eye alighted, a single bag in his hand. Apparently he was well known, for there was a round of greeting—"How do, Scott?" from some, and "Hallo, Poddy!" from others—while one pert youth exclaimed,—

"It's Poddy the Prefect, now—so don't expect any larks!"

The shout of laughter following this sally suggested that the boy just arrived had been known in the past as a jovial

spirit—or one, perhaps, rather given to escapades. There was something about his quick, careless smile which supported this. After a word or two he forged along and pulled up at the house master's sanctum.

Mr. Bishop, busy with two new boys—who *should* have come the day before—heartily shook hands. His greeting, though brief, was unmistakably hearty, for Poddy was a boy whom Mr. Bishop had never faltered in trusting. The master expected much from him as a prefect. At the moment, however, he merely said,—

"I'm doing you a good turn; the end study is now yours."

"Oh, thanks awfully, sir!"

Poddy gained the said study a few minutes later and threw off his hat. Then he paused, for upon the small oaken ledge which would serve as desk or table, he beheld a letter addressed to himself. The postmark was Barnport, but before he

could open the missive there was a riotous charge on the door. A youth of his own age burst in—a youth of aristocratic but altogether freakish features.

"Hallo, hallo, old top! I say, hallo, how are you? How is our Poddy boy now?"

It was a hurricane greeting, mixed up with chuckles and a wringing of the hand. The new comer's full name was Gerald Ditterley St. John Hook Eaton, the son of an honoured family, but his school-fellows called him Mug. He and Poddy, till now, had shared a middle study, and were pals to the backbone—besides, alas, being often brothers in disgrace.

"You old codger, I've a bone to pick with you," ran on Eaton. "Why didn't you come and spend a few weeks with us? You promised you would; what made you bunk out?"

A shadow fell across Poddy's features; the humour died in his eyes. Eaton was prompt to understand.

"Poddy," he went on, in a lower key, "what on earth can it matter now as to who you are or who you aren't?—I thought it was agreed all that should be forgotten. Nobody cares, I'm sure, except yourself. Why——?"

"Oh, I couldn't come, Mug!" burst out the other. "You needn't ask why. But once I arrived at Stowell Barton I felt that there I'd better stick."

"That's a lame sort of reason——"

"I know; I can't explain. It was civil of you to invite me, anyhow, but—there it is. Shall we change the subject?"

"Since you wish it—right-o. I come, by the bye, as an emissary. Luton has just landed; he's now unpacking. You know he has relatives about three miles

from here, at Wenley Cott, including that grown-up cousin of his from the colonies—d'you know, the cove we met on Speech Day."

"Oh, I know—the adventurer!" Poddy's eye glowed. "I say, I've thought of that man often during the holidays; he's such a modest sort, yet I bet he could tell some rare stories. He's hunted in Rhodesia, mined in Australia, and lived in logging-camps elsewhere. I'd like to have a good yarn with him."

"Well, now's your chance. We two and Luton are invited to go out there this very afternoon. Is it a book?"

"Oh, rather! Jolly goo——" Poddy stopped short, his expression changing. "Bother it, we're done!" he declared. "I'd forgotten; it's Wenley Horse Fair to-day. That puts the Cott out of bounds."

"Oh, rot. We aren't going to the Fair, so why worry? It'll be all right."

"There would be a shindy if——"

"I know; but no one's likely to spot us. It's an old risk, anyhow; we've taken our chance before, often enough, and——"

"That's true; Mug, but things have changed. I am now a House Prefect."

They stood regarding each other, each frowning, each in a slight attitude of defiance; Eaton's frown was perhaps the hardest.

"Of course, I expected this," he said bitterly. "You and I, in the past, have had some decent times together, but now you're a pre., I suppose that's all over. You'll have to 'behave.' You'll have to drop me altogether and pal up with such men as——"

"Don't be an ass, Mug!" flushed the other. "For my part, I don't in the least want to alt

"You've altered already," was the sharp retort. "You intend now, I suppose, to keep the letter of the law in everything, and I know that's against your nature, for you're even fonder of freedom than I am. Dash it, we were meant to be free; it's sickening how a school like Penniton simply heaps a man up with fetters!"

"You're talking out of your hat. What sort of place d'you suppose this would be if there weren't any rules?"

"Oh, don't begin to jaw like the good little boy in the book. We should go to Wenley Cott, not to Wenley Fair. It's the spirit of the law that matters; you know that perfectly well."

"Mug, it won't do. I should like to go more than anything, but it's no use."

"Luton will be absolutely sick. He's practically fixed this up for you."

"I'm sorry."

"Then the trip is really off?"

"So far as I'm concerned, yes."

"Well, I'll go and tell Lu."

That was all; Eaton withdrew, leaving Poddy with the uncomfortable impression that he had "let down" a couple of his best pals. Turning, Poddy noticed again the letter that lay waiting, and this time he broke the envelope. The enclosure caused him to stare a little, for the missive, typewritten, was as follows:—

"Memo from AINGER & ROWELL,

"Solicitors,

"Barnport.

"DEAR SIR,—Pray pardon this inquiry, but a client of ours—whose name, at the moment, we are not at liberty to mention—feels interested as to your personal history. We are directed to ask if you

would feel disposed to furnish an account of same? Though unable to explain ourselves fully, we assure you that any particulars you may care to give will be treated with confidence and discretion.

"We are, Sir,

"Yours obediently,

"AINGER & ROWELL."

This epistle, to judge from Poddy's expression, did not please him much at first. His was a dogged nature, and it was a habit with him to rebuff people who were merely inquisitive. On the other hand, he had no motive for concealment, and Mr. David Ainger—the senior partner in this firm—was a very gentle old man whom the boy had known during his days at Barnport.

So, taking out pen and paper, Poddy wrote a reply as follows:—

"Messrs. AINGER & ROWELL,

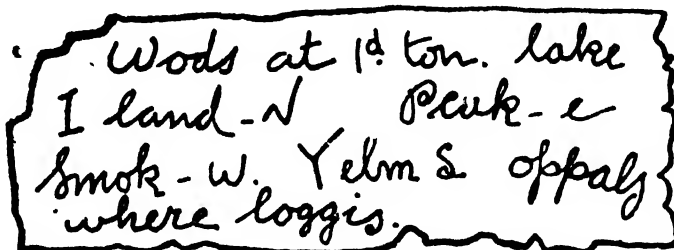
"Barnport.

"DEAR SIRs,—In reply to your letter, I have no objection to your knowing the facts about my childhood. I was picked up in a broken boat by the captain of a rough coasting vessel, and was afterwards given the name of Poddy. This is explained by the fact that a barque called the *Sarah Poddy* was known to have sunk in those waters just before, during a violent gale, and it was supposed that I might be a survivor. But this was never proved, and the skipper referred to kept and looked after me till he himself was lost at sea.

"Thus, at the age of eight, I was left to fend for myself. I became, at Stonehithe, a waif of the docks, selling newspapers and sleeping in a tumble-down

shed owned by one Joe Lumm, a night watchman. Latterly, also, I came to know an old crippled sailor named Tom Thimble, who seemed to think he knew something about me. Tom was, however, weak in the head. He gave me a little brass egg, with writing inside, but this never led me to any discovery. I went to Zion Court

Poddy, having sealed up his letter, addressed it and affixed a stamp. Being given occasion to write all this, his mind continued to dwell upon these strange events of the past. From his pocket he took an odd little brass box, shaped like an egg, and from this drew a piece of paper scrawled as follows :—



Woods at 1st Con. Lake
I land - N Peuk - e
Smok - W. Yelm & oppaly
where loggis.

School, the chairman of which was a Mr. Josiah Puffett. This gentleman had a nephew, named Hugh, and it was through a quarrel with Hugh—whom I caught worrying my little dog, Tatters—that I eventually ran away, getting as stowaway aboard a grain-steamer.

“The latter put in at Barnport, where I crept ashore, making at once for the open country. I fell in with Farmer Scott, of Stowell Barton, and for a time worked on his farm, after which he offered to send me to the Council School at Barnport. There—having taken the name of Scott—I lodged with the farmer’s married sister, Mrs. Flint—being later successful in winning a scholarship which brought me here to Penniton College. On first arriving here, I wasn’t especially pleased to meet Hugh Puffett again, and in the same house. Still, there was nothing of my early history I wished to conceal—and these are the correct facts.

“Faithfully yours,

“PODDY SCOTT.”

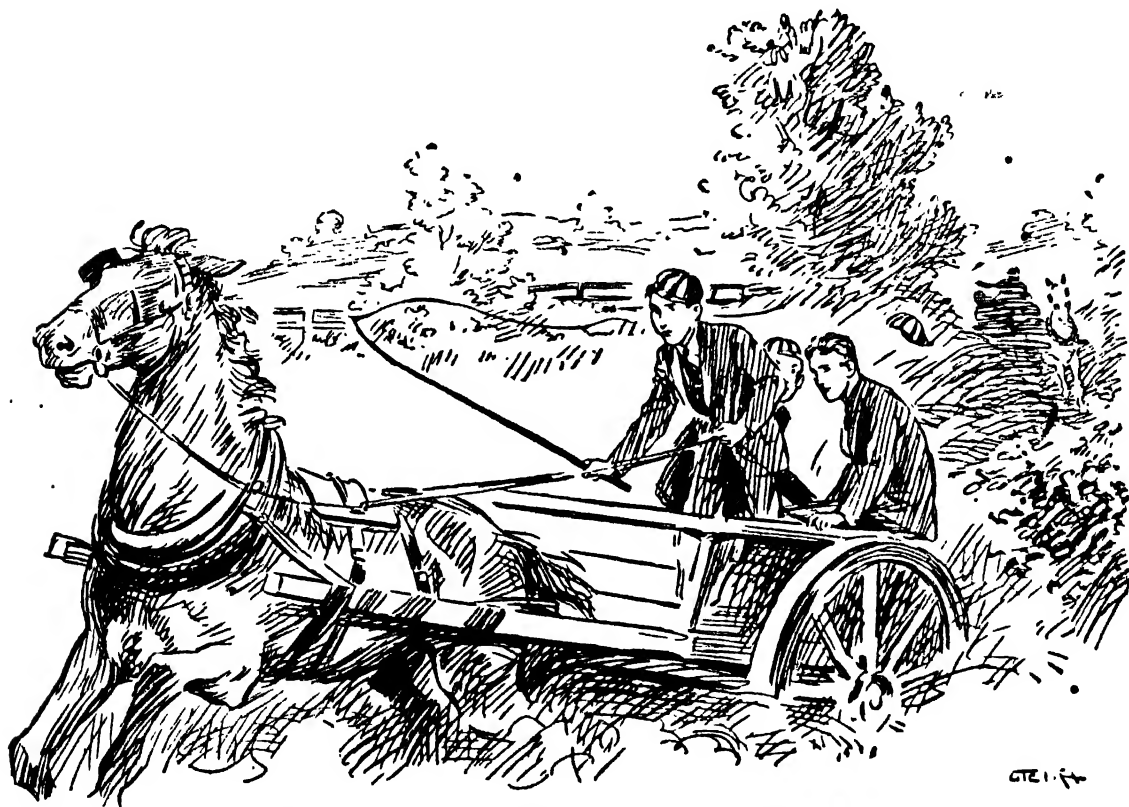
Poddy, shaking his head, restored the bit of paper to its place, but still sat motionless, thinking deeply. He had certainly some reason to be proud of rising to the post of House Prefect at a big school. Nor was it merely a matter of position in class work; he was, with but few exceptions, solidly popular with masters and boys. At least, he *had* been last term; would he continue so now?

That was a disturbing question, and Poddy frowned as he arose to pace the room. The losing of the popularity did not matter so much; the boy was far too independent by nature, and too self-reliant, to be affected by the fear of that. What he would, however, find hard to tolerate would be loss of freedom, and the possible loss of old friends.

His little brush with Eaton, awhile since, rankled in his mind. After all, as Mug had remarked, their intention was quite all right; the proposal was to visit Wenley Cott, not Wenley Fair, and that was the point which mattered.

Poddy could, he believed, have obtained leave for himself, but—owing to much trouble in the past connected with Wenley Horse Fair—it was very doubtful whether permission would be issued for Mug and Luton. Still, wasn't all that just a matter of form?

the fellows had not yet arrived. About a dozen new-comers filled the gaps of those who had left, but the "smart set" were again in evidence, led by Locker and Puffett, while Luton occupied his usual seat opposite. It was a very pensive Luton, however. This boy enjoyed the reputation of being



"Go on, man, she's stopping—make her gee up!"

The more Poddy pondered the more churlish he felt at having turned down a pal's hospitality. For it amounted to that; Luton, apparently, had fixed up the visit in order to please—

It was at this point that the dinner-bell rang, and Poddy went down to hall.

Many places were empty, for quite half

a born jester—full, as a rule, of quips and table-tricks—but though briefly returning our hero's greeting, he completed his meal in silence. Poddy, unable to stand this, spoke on an impulse.

"Lu, about this walk to Wenley Cott. Is it too late for me to change my mind?"

Luton brightened at once.

"Does that mean you'll come?"

"I will on the solemn condition that no attempt whatever is made to visit Wenley Fair. You promise that?"

"Of course we do," chimed in Eaton.

"Why, by starting early, we can reach back in time for tea."

"Perhaps," amended Luton. "Anyhow, that won't matter; there are heaps of fellows to-day who, having brought grub from home, will remain in their studies. After all, term doesn't really start till to-morrow."

"No," answered Poddy. "I bear that fact in mind when I agree to go. No doubt it will be all right. How about starting right away?"

The others were agreeable, and within ten minutes the trio were actually upon the road, Mug whistling a jaunty tune and Luton holding forth mirthfully on the various incidents of his holidays. Any qualm of conscience lingering in Poddy's mind was stilled by the pleasure of again being in company with a couple of firm pals.

The visit turned out a great success, but there was no hope of a quick return, for by five o'clock, the globe-trotting cousin—by name, Maltravers—had only just began to produce his trophies. Though big of stature, and so much travelled, he was a curiously quiet man, with a sober modesty that appealed to his youthful hearers.

After tea the marvels were produced, and it was in the midst of much reminiscence that Poddy pulled out his watch. He gave one gasp, then jumped to his feet.

"It's past 6.30," exclaimed he. "We've less than half an hour in which to cover three miles. Come on!"

It was very much a case for action, and, with hurried adieux, seizing caps and scarves, the three boys burst into the open—led by Luton on a "short cut" across the fields.

No doubt this did save a trifling distance, but so rough was the country that Luton, on arriving at the turnpike, was grievously blown. Unluckily he was no runner, and, what time the cross-roads were passed, he was a drag on the other two. It was now deep dusk.

"We shall never do it!" panted Eaton. "If only we could bag a lift."

A good deal of traffic was coming along from the Horse Fair, but chiefly by cycle or afoot, the only vehicles they saw were already overloaded, and jogging along even slower than the boys were able to run. It was at a row of cottages that Mug uttered a sudden whoop.

"At last, two traps and both empty—we're saved. Look, the one in front is Harry Wall's!"

Poddy's heart, already thudding, gave a bigger thump of hope. Harry Wall was a young rustic who looked after the poultry portion of the manor farm, taking chickens and eggs twice a week to Barnport or Wenley. To-day, no doubt, he had lingered in order to have a glimpse at the stalls, nutshies, and roundabouts which formed the aftermath of the Horse Fair. He and his mare, Sally, were well known to the boys, who had often been given a lift. So the sight of his trap, drawn up now outside Cobbler Dibbs's, gave our friends a thrill of joy.

"Jump in, you two," puffed Eaton. "I'll rout old Harry out."

Saying which, Mug dived into the cottage, where he discovered the kitchen crowded—

hot with the odours of peat-fire and cider. Dibbs, the ancient cobbler, kept now to his stool by rheumatics, was holding forth on his young days—telling tales about Wenley Horse Fair which kept his audience delighted. There were loud guffaws, and a slapping of thighs, so that Eaton, amid mirth and tobacco smoke, peeped in unnoticed. Failing, however, to espy the face he sought, Mug touched one who lolled by the door, a young farm-hand whom he did not know.

"I say, where's Harry Wall?" was his breathless query.

"Eh?" gaped the other. "'Arry Wall? 'E bain't 'ere, mister, not 'Arry. 'E's left this neighbourhood."

"How can that be? His trap's outside."

The other gaped a moment, then was about to explain, but Eaton suddenly felt frantic. A glimpse at the cobbler's clock showed him it was ten minutes to seven. It was morally certain that if he loitered another moment, they would be locked out—and Mug's first thought was for Poddy. Despite all he had said, he would feel miserable to the heart if disgrace came to Poddy through him.

Without another word, therefore, he dashed from the cottage and leapt into the cart. Poddy and Luton were already there, so Mug had merely to snatch the reins and whip Sally up to a gallop. Within a second or so they were rattling along the high road at a tremendous pace.

CHAPTER II

A RACE FOR HOME

"WHAT on earth's this?" gasped Poddy, just saving himself from being jerked

backward. "Have you gone off your chump, man? Where's Wall?"

"I dunno; I couldn't spot him, an' I couldn't stay. Man, it's ten to seven!"

"But——!" Poddy clutched at his seat again, for the whip sang and the pace quickened. "Mug, you idiot!"

"It was the only way!" snapped Eaton, his features set. "I don't care for myself, but if I landed you in a row like this, almost before term's started, I should feel like——" Eaton shut his teeth in order to steer a sharp corner, and then he added, "We must get there before lock-ups—we jolly well *must*!"

"But what if—I say, hark! . . . What's that behind?"

"The other cart. They're after us! It's going to be a chase!"

Luton, who was curled up in the rear, uttered these words with undisguised delight. He was far too hare-brained and prankish to consider the fact of Poddy's now being a prefect, and what this affair might mean. To Luton, as ever, this was just a glorious bit of excitement, beset with sufficient risk to make it thoroughly worth while.

"Tally-ho, here they come!" added he, jumping up and down in the cart. "A race, Mug—a race! Put it on, boy—old Sally will see us through!"

From the pursuing vehicle there now sounded a medley of threats and pleas, in a thick Irish voice, and this Luton recognised. He also guessed at the truth.

"My word!" he cried—"I understand now. It's Patrick Shane in that cart. He used to help Harry Wall. Harry, you may depend, has left, and now Shane is in charge. Oh, I say, it's a mess! He'll swear we ran away with his pony——"

"Well, come to that, so we have," put in Poddy, gripping hard as they coasted another corner. "If Pat sees who we are——"

"He mustn't," said Eaton grimly, flicking again with the whip. "If only we can be first at the ford we shall beat them. Mind—it's going to be bumpy."

A true word: "bumpy," indeed, but mildly expressed it, for Eaton had now forsaken the road and driven down what was really a narrowing lane. The latter, giving only to the ford, had stood disused since the erection of a bridge farther along, so that it was in a state of neglect. Even the hedgerows, overgrown, bent boughs to whip their faces. This, and their rocking progress, drew forth gasps—with more laughter from Luton.

"Glory, what a day!" gurgled he. "Go on, Mug! This is gorgeous. Oh, bumpity-bump—right on my funny-bone!"

"Are they following?" demanded Eaton, who, with Poddy, now humped over Sally's flanks, dodging what was possible of the trailed branches. "Are they still after us?"

"Yes—hark!—yes, they've just entered the lane. They must have pulled up for a bit, I think, wondering whether to risk it—but they're behind us again now. They'll be lucky in a trap of such width if they don't get stuck."

"Oh, no fear of that. They'll barge through all right and nab us yet if—ah-h! Good!"

The dark mouth of the lane had suddenly opened to a broadening, stone-dotted slope going down to the river. This was the old ford—and it was at the last moment, as they shot from the lane-mouth, that

Poddy's cap, often in jeopardy, was swept from his head by a fork of alder.

Nothing, of course, could be done about that; Poddy, indeed, scarce knew he was bare-headed before Sally was in the river and all was splash, splash. The pony, clearly, did not relish the water much, but impetus took her well to the mid-stream.

"Be quick!" urged Luton. "Here they come—and they'll see us better in the open. Go on, man, she's stopping—make her gee up!"

Sally, by this, was down to a walk, but Eaton's urging induced the pony to toil on to the home shallows. There, unluckily, the wheels stuck, while a huge commotion behind announced that the pursuing cart was also down the slope and into the river.

The rival mare liked this sudden bath far less than Sally; she stopped in the very middle with such a jolt that one man, Patrick Shane himself, was shot over a mudboard and plumped into the stream.

"Get out! Jump! We must run!"

This from Eaton, who set the example, and was promptly followed by Poddy. These two, with vigorous leaps, managed almost to escape the river, landing in the soft soil, but Luton was less fortunate. That youth, still shaken with mirth, had first to clamber over the seat. He jumped from there—flopping into the shallows so that his trouser-legs were drenched. The other two, each grabbing an arm, hauled him out, and next breath all three were scuttling hard for the Beech Dip.

The Dip being climbed, our adventuring three strode the school fence and raced down the playing fields. As they did so the school clock began to strike the hour of seven.



‘Then isn’t this your cap?’

“Oh, I say, put it on, or we shall be done, after all!”

As he panted this, Eaton sprinted, being passed by Poddy at the bottom and so led across the gravel. It was altogether a desperate risk, and Poddy arrived at the door of Bishop’s House in time to hear a sharp *click* inside. It had just been locked!

“Beaten!” puffed he, as the other two came pelting along.

“Oh, what awful luck!” Eaton’s hand was raised, he seemed inclined to knock, but restrained himself. It would be the butler’s duty, if he had to admit them now, to escort the boys straight to Mr. Bishop.

“Oh, dash it!” exploded Eaton, though in an undertone, “we can’t be landed like this now. It isn’t fair. We’re not actually

late; to be nailed for it would be hard cheese. What hopes the lobby window?”

He moved to try it, and a gratified breath announced same to be not fastened. Carefully he pushed the narrow sash up and climbed in, nimbly followed by Luton and Poddy. Safely within; they slid down the sash again and could scarcely believe their luck. Eager to flit up to their studies, they put down their heads and rushed—the result being that, round the corner, they collided so heavily with a figure that they left him rolling amid the hats and coats.

Our trio, in their immense hurry, hadn’t even the wit to apologise much; Poddy just saw that the other party to the bump was Hugh Puffett, the boy who had been a rival of his from the earliest days. After

the briefest "Oh, sorry!" the truants dashed on, but Puffett had time to note that all were spattered, Luton being pretty wet, and that two of them wore caps.

Puffett, who had been in with the house master getting advice about form-work, now went on thoughtfully up the stairs himself. There was a queer expression on his face when he reached his own study.

"I wonder," he mused, "what those beggars had been up to? Looks like some sort of game. Perhaps I'll hear more."

It was so fated that he should, and the very next day. The weather happened to be grand, as though summer had decided to make good early, and there were few who did not take advantage of it. Hugh Puffett, having finished a turn at the nets, was reclining alone up-field, lazily watching Bishop's juniors at practice. Across the pitch opposite to him—also away from the rest and near the top bushes—were two middle-school boys, Mead and Cowley.

These two, as it happened, were designed to play a first part in what happened, for suddenly, behind their backs, they heard a rustle, and they peered round to see a long, awkward form emerge from the bushes—that of Patrick Shane, of the Manor Farm.

Shane, after a furtive glance, touched his old straw hat—a hat of the haymaker variety, tattered and worn.

"If Oi may be so bould," he remarked, addressing Cowley, "might I ax your honour a question?"

Cowley glowed a little; he was 'not often used to being called 't your honour.' He made assent.

"Here at this skule," continued Shane, "you go by Houses, I believe? Now,

what about Bishop's House? Is there a such?"

"Of course," answered Cowley, "we belong to it."

"Arrah, then!" Pat eyed them closely. "Maybe it's one ov ye whose name starts off wi' a P?"

"No," was the answer—"C and M."

"Then perhaps ye'll be tellin' me; I want those beginnin' wi' P."

Cowley considered.

"Let's see, there was Pelling," he murmured, "but he left last term. I don't fancy—oh, of course, Puffett. Can you think of any others, Mead?"

Mead, cogitating, said not, so Patrick Shane was directed to the reclining figure on the opposite side of the pitch. Hugh Puffett was pinching the crease in his spotless flannel when the grizzled Patrick hove up and touched the brim of his straw. Some light of battle now glowed in the Irishman's eye.

"Ho!" observed he—"so it's yerself that's Masther Puffett, eh? Got yer, then!"

Puffett stared at the man with calm inquiry, languid and unmoved. Patrick thrust his grizzled chin forward.

"By the pigs, Masther Puffett, an' pwhat about lass night, eh? Stole my pony an' trap, didn't ye—bolted off wi' same an' left it stranded in the river. It's you, Oi s'pose, who thought that a rare caper; thought it rale funny, too, when ye saw me jolted overboard. Man alive, it's not goin' to be quite so funny fur ye now. Oi'm goin' to make ye pay, an' smartly too! Pwhat hev ye to say?"

The wonder on Hugh's face became mildly contemptuous.

"I suppose—" he remarked, "it's the

sun or something; you've had a bit of a stroke. When you've cooled you'll feel better. At present you're off your chump."

"Ah, don't come yer blarney on me!" growled Shane, stooping yet lower and looking more ugly. "Is there any other young spalpeen in Misther Bishop's House besides yerself whose name begins wi' a P?"

"No, come to think of it, I don't think there is," was the answer.

"Very well, then, an' weren't ye at Wenley Hoss Fair yesterday?—where, faith, I know ye'd no right to be, as countin' on skule rules!—an' didn't ye stale my pony-trap from outside Cobbler Dibbs's, an' afther that lead me a fine race the length av the river? 'Bout seven o'clock it was. Ye daring young gomeril!—an' would ye still be denying it?"

"I tell you I don't know what you are jawing about."

"Then isn't this your cap?"

From his pocket the farm-man tugged a crumpled object, and he pointed to where, on the inside lining, some inky characters appeared. These, though largely rubbed, could yet be deciphered as—"P.—Bishop's House."

"Pwhat," demanded Shane, "hev ye got to say to this?"

Puffett sat up with sudden interest. He murmured "*Poddy!*"—for back to his mind flashed that incident of yesterday, when Eaton, Poddy, and Luton had collided with him just after lock-ups. Poddy, he well remembered, had been capless. So they *had* come in by the lobby window—and there had been some escapade.

"Look here, Shane," said Puffett promptly, and in quite a fresh tone of voice, "you've made a bad shot in accusing

me. At the time you mention I was in the house, with the master in his study—if you don't believe that, I invite you to come straight along and inquire. You see, I'm not afraid."

"But, the cap——?"

"Isn't mine. I might, though, if I set myself about it, track down the owner of it soon. As things stand, Shane, I think you'd better leave this job to me."

"Ho, you do, do ye?" muttered the other, not nearly mollified as yet. "But how about the fright an' the ducking that pony got, not to mention me an' the mare. Shure, an' don't Oi deserve some sort av——?"

"Yes, you do." Hugh drew half a crown from his pocket, slipping same into Shane's horny palm. "So now, my man, just leave the rest to me and be content. I shall know how to manage."

The air with which this was spoken duly impressed the other; no doubt he supposed that Puffett was no less than a prefect himself, if not a school captain. Hugh Puffett, by now, was a well-grown youth, aristocratic of mien and possessed of complacence more than enough to impress Shane. The man, at all events, after more halting, pulled at the brim of his straw and shambled away. The feel of that coin in his hand made departure somewhat easier.

As for Hugh Puffett, he sat with Poddy's cap over his knee and an odd smile on his face. It would have been hard to fathom what passed through his mind.

Luckily, as boys grow up their characters are apt to grow bigger as well. Hugh Puffett, anyhow, was less petty in these days—yet had he not reason to resent the progress which Poddy, a mere nobody

from nowhere, had made at Penmiton, both in the school and in the house? Why were his claims—Hugh's—so consistently overlooked, while Poddy, a noted scapegrace, was put continually in places of favour? Was it any way just?

Hugh, of course, thought not; he did not appreciate the fact that masters discriminate between harmless, headstrong pranks and less innocent misdoings. This boy, early last term, had been caught running a card-party in his study—a fact which stood against him in the masters' eyes far more than all Poddy's scrapes put together.

Still, reflected Hugh, it was no trivial offence for a House Prefect—Poddy being that now—to attend Wenley Horse Fair without leave and slip back into the house after lock-ups. What Patrick Shane had divulged should be saved up—and the tell-tale cap Hugh, on returning to his study, carefully stowed in a cupboard.

CHAPTER III

PODDY SETS TO WORK

It was two or three days later that a parcel arrived by post for Hugh Puffett. What that parcel contained shall be kept for the moment a secret; suffice that, for a mere toy, it occasioned a great deal of stir. Locker, Hugh's special pal—a sallow, glib youth, and the actual leader in such affairs—was first beckoned into the study, and presently others followed. They came on tiptoe, gathering round the allurement, and, when another step was heard, there was a rush on the part

of Locker to wrap the article up in its paper and to push it beneath the table.

"It's only old Rumbell," whispered Clare. They all breathed again, while the new-comer—a slow, lumpish youth—made part of the crowd that stayed for a further inspection.

Gradually, during the next few weeks, it became evident that something was causing attraction in Hugh Puffett's study. The older prefects, it is true, were about as blind to the matter as they had been in terms past, but Poddy, at all events, having become a prefect, was bound to conduct his duties with liveness and vigour. His presence was already being felt, but it was Eaton—the reputedly careless "Mug"—who first gave tongue to this matter.

"I say," remarked he one day, as he perched on Poddy's window-ledge—"what new devilment are Locker and Co. up to? Any idea?"

"No," answered Poddy, with a quick glance, "but I'm sure there's something on."

"Without a doubt," answered Eaton, and he frowned a bit, drumming his heels. "That Locker man is more of a beast than ever, and so's Rumbell. Puffett, really, is decent compared with them. It wouldn't matter if they made a clique to themselves, but they're drawing in others—kids, too, new ones like Frost and Murton. They ought to be dropped on."

"Well, I'm ready to do it," said Poddy, "but it's not so easy. Those beggars are pretty spry."

Poddy, during the next few days, had more reason for knowing this. He was handicapped by the fact that he had no ordinary excuse for paying snap visits to the suspected study, and what effort

he did make had an immediate effect of warning the offenders off.

More than ever was Poddy determined to follow up, for he was soon convinced that the little clique had merely shifted their meeting-place. Remaining, for a while, off the scent, he one day observed

The latter, he felt sure, were decent fellows enough; certainly there had been no sign of their "cutting" net practice till the past few days.

So over the rails strode Poddy, and down the Beech Dip, in time to see the rearguard of the secret circle disappear amid the



Poddy, rushing in, had just time to behold a last leg disappearing.

Three boys—Locker, Frost, and Clare—climb the fence into Beech Dip, followed just after by Hugh Puffett and some others.

Much as he disliked the "detective" business, Poddy was bent on keeping this excursion in view, thinking, particularly, of boys like Frost, Murton, and Clare.

hedge of high elder bushes that fringed Penniton Manor estate. This was strictly forbidden ground, save for a favoured few, but Poddy, thanks to a service which the school cadets had rendered Squire Penniton, was among the chosen.

There was a gap in the hedge, and Poddy, having worked through, found small

difficulty about pursuit: Here there were no paths, progress having to be made through a maze of growth, so that noise could not be avoided. There was a *swish, swish* ahead, and presently, by the first open glade, our friend caught sight of his hurrying quarry.

By now, of course, Poddy was warmed up by the tracking. He felt no further qualms; the behaviour of those boys ahead was furtive in the extreme, so that it became a fair case of matching wits.

One of the other of them often would throw a glance back, so it was touch and go all the way, Poddy having to drop flat and frequently wait till they had plunged again into farther growth. At length the coverts opened to the shores of the Manor lake.

This was a broad, beautiful sheet of water, with an island of trees in the midst. The island, to be exact, was not in mid-lake; it lay up much closer to the opposite shore—and there, amid the sedges, a brace of punts were moored.

Towards these, rapidly skirting, the seven boys hurried, always in Red Indian style, crouching, keenly mindful of not being seen. Half the spice of the exploit to boys like Frost and Clare, no doubt, consisted in this thrill of “getting there.” Freeing one of the punts, they stepped aboard and poled themselves across. Within four minutes they had gained the little isle and the island growth had engulfed them.

Poddy, with dogged looks, now also arose and picked his path round, coming to inspect the second punt. It was in no very sound condition, but there was a pole to which it was moored, and he guessed it would do. Embarking, he too ferried to the island and stepped ashore.

Squire Penniton, of late, had shown more interest in his estate, and had hired more men, but it was such a huge place, and—through some disappointment in the old man’s life—had been neglected for so many years, that it was still wildly overgrown, and, in parts, deserted. It was clear at a glance that this tiny isle was not in the beat of any keeper; indeed, it was all such a tangle that Poddy had the greatest task even to enter upon the trail of those others.

Twice he was “hung up” in loops of bramble, having to press back and try some other way. He was surprised to come upon some upright logs and to realise that this must be the flank of a small hut. Had he pushed leftward he would have come to an aperture, the open substitute for a window; as it happened, he moved rightward and perceived a door.

The latter was ajar; Poddy could hear the boys’ voices and a spinning, metallic sound. With vigour, he threw himself at the door—and then it stuck.

The truth was that, in the absence of a catch, a bit of ash sapling had been used prop-wise to hold the door. This, loose at first, actually jammed with the prefect’s shove, so that those within received warning. He heard their startled gasps, a jingle of coins, and the commotion of their retreat as, by sheer pressure, he caused the sapling to back away and the door to clash open. Poddy, rushing in, had just time to behold a last leg disappearing through the window-hole.

Checking his plunge, Poddy swung round on a small rough table in the middle. Here there were some scattered ha’pennies, with a few more on the ground, and some small scraps of paper, on one of which was

scribbled the names of what appeared to be racehorses. But a main object appeared to be missing, and Poddy now dashed out again to gain the water's edge.

The latter he reached in time to see the first punt, fully loaded, being run back to the sedges of the main shore. The delinquents, with startled glances back, were soon dashing in among the woodland growth, Puffett being the last to disappear. Under his arm he hugged some wrapped object, the sight of which made Poddy the more eager. Within three minutes he too was across and spattering up through the sedges.

"Stop!" he shouted, but the word only caused those boys to scud the faster. Blindly, as it seemed, they were stumbling through the thickets, an altogether frightened proceeding—seeing that Poddy had already spotted them and would, in due course, bring them easily to book. Hugh Puffett, however, had broken leftward, and was charging his hardest towards the seaboard of the estate.

Buttoning his jacket, Poddy set out to pursue, and soon it was a race indeed, at a headlong gallop. Now it was free going between big timber, and now over open wiry turf till the broad sea burst to view. A narrow cliff-track formed a ledge, and where the turf curved over to this the fugitive was overtaken by a spirited rush.

"Look out! Mind!"

It was too late, however, for either boy to check himself. Poddy had lost his balance by making a pounce, while Hugh forfeited his by a vain try to elude. Shoulder to shoulder, jostling, they pitched down the turf and thumped on the flinty track. There were several feet of safety

to spare, though out beyond was a sheer drop to a churn of breakers below.

Puffett, with some word of fury, struggled to his feet, and Poddy did the same. Both, by that collapse, had been pretty severely jarred, while Hugh's loose package had fallen with a crash. Poddy dived to seize this, but the other brought in his fist with a half-arm blow that sent our friend reeling.

Now, the offence of giving battle to a prefect was much discouraged at Penniton, the more so because a prefect, by all the rules, was debarred from hitting back. The present case, however, was somehow different; here was old rivalry, long bottled up, and Poddy, as much as the other, rejoiced to give vent at last. He had, anyhow, been altogether roused by that punch, so in he sailed like the Poddy of old, quite reckless, with no thought in his mind save that of "having it out."

It was an amazing bout. There were, as we have said, some feet of track to spare, with a rise towards the brink; despite which, however, there were some giddy totterings in the wilder moments of combat. Both presently, sensing danger, manœuvred a bit, backing the way of the path before raining their blows. The skill of that first exchange was all with Hugh; he was tall, and he battled with his head.

Poddy, however, was a fighter to the core, and could thrive by it; two grazes to the cheek scarcely shook him, and he put a jolt to the ribs in return. By reason of that near-by precipice, and by innate chivalry, he was hitting well within his strength, while the "knock-out" he administered contained just the required vim. Puffett went down his full length, *thud*, the back of his head, luckily, upon a

PODDY THE PREFECT

soft pad of turf. He was dazed; he presently struggled up, but the fight was all out of him.

Poddy, observing this, unclenched his hands and picked up the parcel of mystery. This he unwrapped, to discover within a big sort of racing toy—a model race-course with several horses made to spin round a metal track. The “game,” no doubt, consisted in guessing as to which horse, after each spin, would “finish first.”

“I see,” said Poddy dryly, “so you were betting ha’pennies on this—a bett recreation than cricket on a bright summer day.” He regarded Puffett with a faint smile of contempt. “Get up,” he added.

Puffett, with the hot colour mounting to his cheeks, arose. His eyes were sullen, yet half-afraid.

“What are you going to do?” he asked.

“Well, first, I’d better do ~~for~~ this.”

Poddy, as he spoke, planted the “sporting” toy on a flat space of rock, picked up a heavy flint, and proceeded to pound the object with vigour. Having reduced it to a broken, shapeless mass, he flung it far out over the cliff into the churn of sea below.

“Now,” he remarked briskly, “it’s time we were both moving. I’d better pop back to the island, but you will go straight to the school along this path. Straight, mind!”

Hugh gave a curt nod, and, turning, sprinted off without another word. Poddy watched him out of sight, then plunged himself back towards Manor Island, his idea being to see if there was any evidence remaining in the hut which should be removed. On coming near the lake, however, he glanced at his watch, and got a little surprise.

“Whew!” murmured he—“I’d no idea it was so late. I shall need to abandon this now, and hope for the best; a near thing if I get home for roll-call, even if I run my hardest.”

It was a near thing, but Poddy—with hardly the dignity expected in a prefect—galloped on to the school gravel just in time to take his place in the ranks.

CHAPTER IV

A CASE OF COMMOTION

SHOULDERED now with a real responsibility, Poddy began to take a grip of himself and to face matters with resolution. He knew now that everything was not well with Bishop’s House. Dennison, the second prefect, had just been moved to take the headship of a new house, while Whitley, the nominal captain, was preoccupied with papers for a scholarship he had been permitted to attempt at a late moment. The next two prefects, Carruthers and Cann, were not much more than figureheads—the sum total being, much of ragging in the dormitories at night, disorder in the corridors by day, with secret bullying in Junior Common Room—and such other mischief as this betting game on the island.

“It’s high time to put the brake on,” growled Poddy—“and here goes for a start!”

Picking up his cane of office—a brand-new implement, not yet used—he marched along to Hugh Puffett’s study, and—as he had rather hoped—found Locker and Rumbell there as well.

“Good,” he remarked. “The prime



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They saw Murphy being held down over a form by Locker

offenders, I observe; I shall be able to deal with you all together." Stepping in, Poddy closed the door. "I've considered it all," he added, "and I don't propose to preach a lot. The worst part of your offence was luring kids like Howe, and Murton, and Frost into your rotten habits. Next time I shall certainly report you; this time I am making it three hundred times and ten strokes apiece. Have you anything to say?"

Locker, it appeared, did have a bit to say, and he was sputtering to say it, with wrath and abuse, when Puffett stopped him with "Shut up, you goat!" and made a threatening gesture.

"You can appeal if you wish," pointed out Poddy. "I'll take you to Mr. Bishop, or to the prefects——"

"No!" said Puffett promptly, for the one thing he most desired was not to be reported, "we don't want that."

"Very well, then. Bend."

Poddy had a strong right arm, and he laid on with a will, leaving the culprits severely tingling, and then he went off to a study brew with Eaton. There was the light of the campaigner in his eye now; he told Mug what had taken place as he buttered a scone.

"Mum's the word, of course," added he. "I want to give Puffett a fair chance; there's a heap of good in him, I'm sure, despite his snobbery. Better man than Locker, anyhow, or that lout Rumbell."

"Admitted," said Mug, pouring out the coffee. "Those beggars need a bit of watching."

"Nothing truer—and they're going to get it. Tell you what, Mug—you, and Lee, and I, up to this, have sort of fooled round and let things slide. Others have done

ditto, even the pres—and note the result. The house is growing absolutely rowdy; in some ways it's going to the bad. It ought to be pulled up now, and I'm for it."

Poddy meant what he said, and—thanks to alertness—was in time to stop a most promising skirmish between Dormitories C and B that very night. It appeared that inmates of C had retired to find their beds half-filled with thistles, and other prickly growth—but this fact did not come out until afterwards. Suffice that Mr. Bishop got to hear something of the affair, and made inquiries, but Poddy "did the sporting thing" by keeping mum as to names.

Every one appreciated this, and there was already evidence that Poddy's rule—if he chose to assert himself in the house—would be pretty generally accepted. House troubles, however, cannot be mended in a single night, and undercurrents of unrest led to big doings on the Friday.

Throughout that day there had been threats and rumours that Dormitory D meant to spring a surprise on C, and every one went to bed wondering what really would happen. Lights Out found the building silent, but it was typical of the pale Cann—who was supposed to govern—that he should allow about half a dozen of his room-mates to go down the corridor and listen.

"If we find everything quiet," had been the specious argument, "we shall feel safer to lie down and go to sleep."

Evidently the D boys had expected some such sortie, and had duly prepared for it by wedging an old zinc bath containing some water across the dark corridor. The creeping cohort from C, as a result,

barked their ships and fell headlong into the bath before they knew it—colliding with each other, splashing up the wet, and then tipping over in a sopping heap! Adding insult to injury, there was a chorus of glee from the threshold of Dormitory D.

This proved the last straw. The cold bath itself was bad enough; that half the rival "dorm" should be out to laugh was altogether too much.

"Go for them, boys! They've asked for it. *Go on!*"

It is hard to say which of the C-ites uttered these words, but the hot spirit of them promptly "caught on." There was a dash at the half-open dormitory door, first on the part of two or three, then on the part of many—for those within, directly an attack was threatened, had dodged back, and were now striving to push the door shut.

Naturally, the C-ites, even those who had first halted, plunged to the job, and soon that door was groaning between those who strained from within and those who drove from without. Others also came running along from C, stumbling over the bath and joining the affray.

"Lump up—lump up!" was gasped from inside. "Don't let them come any farther—ah, *mind!* Stick to it!"

"In you go, lads—in you go!" snorted one Jackson in response. "Put your backs to it, C-ites! We aren't going to stand being drenched by them. To it! . . . Oh, bravo—we're doing it! We're goin' fast——!"

They truly were; indeed, after an epic struggle, the sinews of the ipsiders seemed to fail them altogether. Resistance abruptly gave way, with the result that the door jerked open and the storming party went

inward in a mass, pitching heavily upon the floor and upon the limbs of the scattered "foe."

At once it was chaos, with tramlings and squeezes and a cracking of pates against the posts of cubicles. But for the darkness, perhaps, the warring units might have realised the madness of the scene, and discretion would have stayed their wrath. As it was, they saw nothing, but felt much—felt their smarting joints and trodden hands. Besides this, every turn they made in the murk bumped them into more trouble!

"Go on, you men—rush them! Go on!"

"Get b-back! Oh, you mules! D'you want—ugh!"

Some were still toppled upon the floor, some were punching and some wrestling. Mixed up with the groans and the thumps there were gurgles of helpless laughter, and above all the pleading tones of Caruthers—who was head boy there—as he strove to make the peace. But few heard him, and none heeded, till something happened which brought all to their senses.

Jackson Mi and Ma were the authors. They had somehow found each other in the dark, and "foes" for the moment, each secretly enjoying this wild set-to, they had clutched each other and reeled into a spare cubicle near the door where the maids were allowed to keep sundry pans, brushes, and other such upstairs gear.

What happened exactly was this: some light housemaid's steps were propped there askew, supporting as on shelves an empty pail, some small brushes, and a dust-pan. Into this staggered the panting brothers, locked in the gladdest combat, and out into the room shot those housemaid's

steps—the pail, pans, and brushes then meeting the wall with a crash that woke the echoes! The pail, indeed, danced and danced, as if unwilling to stop—and with the final rattle of it there came swift, felt-shod steps along the corridor.

The D-ites, who, recovering a bit from the fright, made a dive for bed, were too late to escape notice, for the door was now open, and there stood Poddy with a lighted candle in his hand.

"Good grief! What on earth *has* been going on here?"

Poddy's features, despite surprise, had never appeared more forcible as he gazed on the disorder, and then at the flushed, sheepish faces. His crisp inquiries, at first, elicited little response, then every one seemed eager to blame every one else. Cann, of course, had not much of a case to plead, for the C-ites ought never to have been out of their dorm. at all.

"I tell you what ~~it is~~,^{it is}," said Poddy bluntly; "you fellows in charge of these rooms will have to stiffen up a whole lot; you simply appear to have *let* things happen. Now, then, everybody—buck off where you belong! To-morrow will be soon enough to deal with you—and you may thank your lucky stars that Mr. Bishop doesn't sleep on this side. Hustle!"

Again, perhaps, on this occasion, Poddy thought of coming between the offenders and the house master's ire, but it was not to be—for the simple reason that, having restored order, Poddy collided with Mr. Bishop as he made for his own corridor.

"What is it, Scott?" demanded the house master sharply. "I was across the gravel with Mr. Thorpe—we both thought we heard some noises. Has there been some fresh disturbance?"

So Poddy was obliged to outline the facts.

"You were firm with them?" queried the master; "you've settled things all right?"

"Yes, sir; there's no fear of another outbreak to-night."

"Very well. Look into the House Study before dinner to-morrow. There's a good deal that ought to be said."

Poddy kept the appointment, but it was not, apparently, Mr. Bishop's first interview for the day. Cann and Caruthers, as a result of last night, had not actually been asked to tender their resignations, but they had been only too willing to quit office as room-prefects—and had looked with favour, also, on Poddy's taking precedence.

"This means," pointed out Mr. Bishop, "that you now occupy Dennison's place as second prefect—with the strong chance, at any moment, of Whitley's taking up that technical scholarship, in which case you become head boy in the house. For the moment I am putting you in charge of C Dormitory, with Eaton as room-prefect in D."

Eaton! So Mug—the happy-go-lucky Mug—was landed for office at last! Poddy was amused, but also deeply pleased. Mug, since that wild escapade with the pony-trap, had showed signs of taking life a bit more in earnest. It was timely, quite, that he should be given a duty to perform.

"Now about last night's uproar," proceeded Mr. Bishop, "who was really to blame?"

"That, sir, is exactly what I am trying to find out," was Poddy's answer. "In a way, it wouldn't be fair to give heavy

punishment all round, for some felt they had a real grievance. We ought to get right back to the root of the bother."

"And what was that?"

"Well, sir," replied Poddy, beginning to smile, "I am afraid it was a case of thistles and thorns—gathered, it appears, by the armful and planted in the C-ites beds! I hear it whispered that the fellow in B who suggested this prank was very careful not to take part in it himself—sort of sneaked out at the last moment. So he's the fellow we want."

"I quite agree with you, Scott," was the house master's prompt comment. "Proceed on those lines. I am sure, now that I've spoken to you, that I can safely leave this inquiry to Whitley and to yourself. I rely on you, Scott, to be both fair and firm."

"Well, I'll do what I can, sir," promised Poddy.

The whole house, as a result, was called together that evening by Whitley—the head prefect having reluctantly left his "swotting" for this purpose—and the whole question of dormitory unrest was sifted. Minor punishments were handed out, but, do what they would, the prefects could not obtain the name of that meanly-disposed person who had kept cunningly out of the "thistle-bed" scheme after egging his room-fellows on. When first the question was put, a small boy named Murphy jumped up and began,—

"Please, I know all about that. I-I helped to pick the thistles an' b-brambles an' things, we all did, but the suggestion was made by—"

And there the small boy stuck fast—afraid, after all, to be "telling tales," and also very much afraid of a threatening

look that had managed to engage his from the other end of the room. So Murphy, suddenly limp, sat down quicker than he had arisen, and no amount of pressure on the prefects' part could induce the skulking member to own up.

So the meeting dissolved, in a chastened mood, and Whitley, as he parted from Poddy, said,—

"Well, anyhow, Scott, we've got things so well in hand that we need fear no repetition of such rows this term. I'm sure you'll keep 'em tame all right, with Mug in the next dorm. to help."

"The lad I mean to tame," said Poddy, "is the one who arranged that thistle wheeze and then kept carefully clear of it. He's the one I must corner somehow."

"Well, I wish you luck; it may happen to leak out somehow."

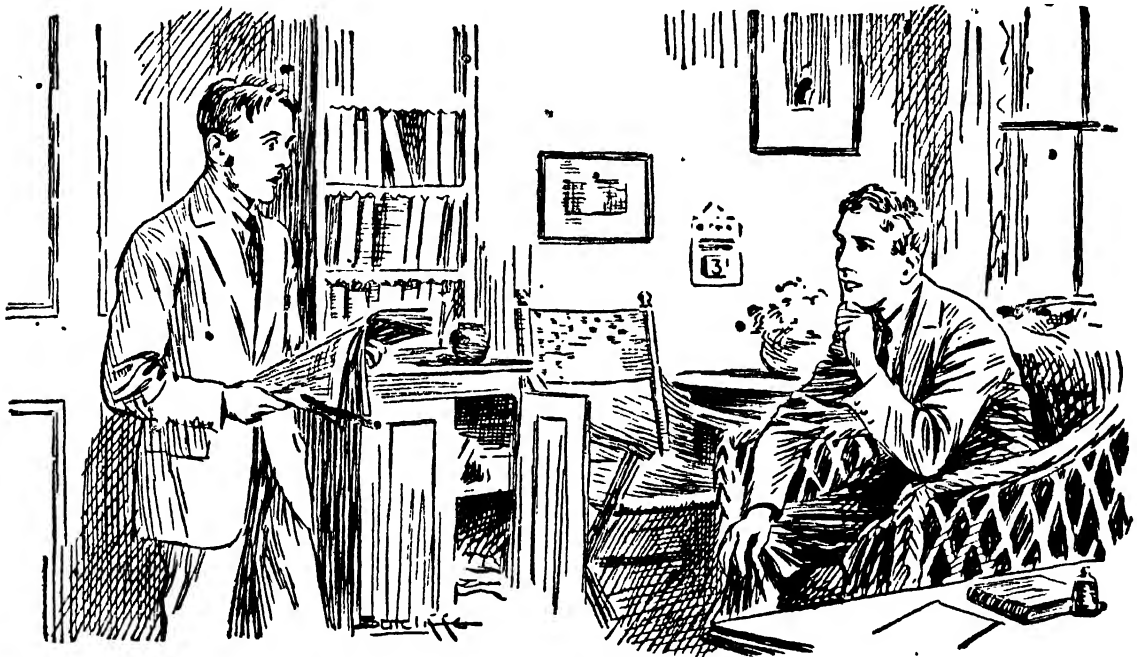
The thing happened sooner than Poddy expected, for Charteris—now house cricket captain—presently came to the end study. Charteris was eager for Poddy's opinion of a selection he had put on the board that evening, so they descended to examine same. The notice-board was near the Junior Common Room door—where the recent meeting had been held—and that door was ajar. A whimpering sound came from within, and then words in the child Murphy's voice. The voice rose shrilly, so Poddy caught the tail-end of a sentence:

". . . you know you did, Locker! You told us where we could pick the thistles, an' those prickly teazle tops. It was all y-your idea——!"

"And what if it was!" This snarled in the voice of Locker. "Do you think I'm going to have a measly little squeaker like you split on me now? The whole joke's done with, so if you dare——"

The rest of the threat was spoken too thickly to be heard from outside, but a sudden wail suggested that blows were being delivered. In rushed Poddy, followed by Charteris, and they saw Murphy being held down over a form by Locker. The latter's unpleasant features were set in vindictive lines; indeed, he was almost showing his teeth as, pinning the junior

well knew, that had been terrorising the "Fags' Room" for long enough, and also having its ill effect on other parts of the house. Locker, more than any other of his set, represented the trouble-spot, but, as a rule, he proved too wily to be caught. Having got him now, however, Poddy was determined to give him a taste of his own medicine.



Never had the amiable Mug looked so upset.

with one hand, he employed the other to lash with a bit of strap.

In a trice, seizing Locker's collar, Poddy jerked him off, using such force that the other collapsed backward. Locker was more or less beside himself; when he saw who had thus seized him he wriggled with all his might, breaking into a flood of abuse.

This was the sort of thing, as Poddy

"That cane, Charteris," he said, "the thickest one. Just hand it out of the cupboard, will you?"

Locker, hearing this, spat and struggled the more, but, though they were both of an age, this Locker was a weedy youth, and Poddy had not much trouble in forcing him down with one hand. Nor was Poddy too gentle about it either, for the other was now at a state of fury, nor was his

tirade quite the sort of thing to be heard in that room.

"Silence!" barked Poddy. "If I hear another word like that I'll double your dose."

"Let me go, will you!" choked the other. "You—you—ah! You d-daren't swipe me here—I!"

He said no more, at least, not clearly, for the cane was now in Poddy's hands, and he began to wield it with all the power of his arm. He did not count the strokes; his simple plan was to lay strongly on till he had broken this youth's offensive mood. About a dozen strokes did it, all tingers; Locker then went limp and began to whimper wildly. When Poddy let him go he rolled to the floor, shaken with sobs and the after-spasms of wrath. Then, rising, he made a rush from the room.

CHAPTER V

A NOTE BY THE WAY

It is singular how, in a school boarding-house like Bishop's, just one incident will have the effect of changing the tide and tone of things. Locker, apparently, was not merely a trouble-spot, he was *the* trouble-spot; and that sound thrashing before the youngsters had lowered his flag a good deal. Certainly the small boys, on this account, began to live a happier life, while many of Locker's own set—notably Hugh Puffett—distinctly cooled towards him.

The final reckoning had still to come, but from now onward there was a better feeling in Bishop's, and more response to the call of the open. The summer weather

of the next five weeks was ideal, and a lukewarm interest in cricket improved under the wholesome encouragement of Poddy and Charteris. Bishop's usually seemed to possess a moderate team, the one variety, according to tradition, that never gets into cup glass.

Charteris, however, began to import new blood, so that some of the Old Guard began to look to their places. Hugh Puffett, a really skilful bowler on his day, was among these, as were also Luton, Davenant, and the genial Mug. In the first round of the house matches they drew with Harrington's, putting the game off with four wickets in hand. This seemed to merit no special remark, but, when, later, they defeated houses like Clarke's and Fraser's, thus getting into the semi-final—Bishop's versus Harding's—there was some cause for excitement.

Cricket, after that, became the popular daily fare; anything outside cricket, save the ever-compulsory form-work, simply didn't seem to exist. Poddy sort of lived in it, as in a world without a flaw, so that when the new issue of the *Pennitonian* came into his hands one morning, and his eye met a certain paragraph, the shock he received was pretty complete.

This was the official school magazine, edited by one of the fellows—a prefect named Kirkwood—being altogether a sober sort of journal. Anything in the too "personal" way was strictly taboo, the only feature of this kind allowed being some pages entitled "Notes by the Way." Here Kirkwood dealt in a very polite manner with house news, school successes, team appointments, etc., so judge Poddy's surprise when he came to the last paragraph. This read:—

"We can hardly commend Bishop's House on their latest choice in prefects. Who is he, anyhow, and why should he be elected to office? Is it because of his wild escapades? Is it because, on the day of reassembly, he—in company with two choice friends—broke a serious school rule by attending Wenley Horse Fair, afterwards racing home in a stolen pony-trap, which latter he left stranded in the river? These are facts! Can the offender deny them? He had better not, anyhow, for the cap he lost—bearing his initial and name of house—is now safely locked in a study cupboard. An item of news like this should cause a stir."

Poddy stared at all this in fascination, scarce able to believe what he saw. Eaton happened to look in just then, so he was also called to peruse. Never, perhaps, had the amiable Mug looked so upset about anything before. His expression was blank, and pale.

"What a facer!" muttered he. "I say, we're done—I mean, *you* are. I don't care a fig for myself—I never did. But it's awful, Poddy, if that little exploit is going to wreck you now."

"It won't wreck me," answered Poddy in a level tone.

Eaton glanced at him sharply.

"You puzzle me a bit over this, Poddy," he declared—"you have from the first. You haven't worried; by the next day, I noticed, you seemed to have got it clean off your mind. I suppose you thought there was no fear of our being booked? Of course, after all this while, I believed myself we were safe. But now——" He stared once more at the mag. "What shall you do?"

"Why, see the worthy editor at once. Here goes!" ..

Not stopping for his cap, Poddy hurried forth, being lucky to find the editor in. Also present was Mill, now the Captain of the School, while between them, on the table, was a copy of the *Pennitonian*, opened at "Notes by the Way." When the editor saw who it was his countenance fell.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I—I suppose *you've* spotted it too?"

Poddy noted the tone.

"Well, it's very much there to be spotted, isn't it?" said he, with an odd smile. "Treating me roughly, aren't you?"

The editor flushed. "Good grief!" he exclaimed—"you surely couldn't think I wrote it!"

"I thought I'd just call and ~~inquire~~ *inquire*."

"Of course, I know absolutely nothing about it; the thing's a mystery. It was Mill, here, who noticed and came to point it out. Fortunately, I've sent this number to only one or two houses as yet, and I shall do everything I can to get every copy back. You may trust me for that. I shall have quite a new lot run off."

"But how about this bit of gossip? Do you mean that it wrote itself and crept in when you weren't looking?"

Mill laughed, but Kirkwood made a gesture of despair. He pulled a strip of printed paper from a clip and pushed it over for Poddy to see.

"There it is, anyhow," he said—"in the original. The thing I did first, on being told of this, was to send my fag to the printers' for an explanation. They retorted by sending back the 'proof' of my notes. The mysterious bit of copy, as you see, has been scribbled on at the

end, but certainly not in *my* writing. . . . You don't, I suppose, chance to identify that hand ? ”

Poddy glanced at the shapeless scrawl and shook his head.

“The man who wrote that,” observed Mill, “didn't mean it to be recognised. I can't help thinking that the printing people must have been awful duffers not to smell a rat.”

“Oh, you mustn't blame them,” returned Kirkwood ; “they simply plod along and set up whatever is sent to them.”

“Have you got any idea how the dodge was managed ? ” asked Poddy, who was still inspecting the proof.

“I only know that it wasn't done when the proof-slips left this room. The moment I had finished correcting them I rolled them all together, slipped on a rubber band, and let my fag, Winter, have them to take to the town.”

“You've questioned Winter ? ”

“Yes—and here we stand to learn more. Winter, being cornered, confesses that he did not carry out the errand himself. He chanced upon a day boy—one Manderson—who would have to pass the office, and he handed the job on to him ! I've just sent Winter to find this Manderson boy. If—ah, I think they're coming.”

It was, indeed, the editor's fag who now appeared, with a yet smaller and more freckled youth in tow.

“Here's Manderson,” announced Winter. “He says——”

“Just so,” interposed the editor—“we'll have our information straight from the bubbling source. Now, Manderson, have you managed to recall anything about this affair ? What happened to those proofs you carried to the printing works ? ”

“Nothing, Kirkwood, really ! ” declared the freckled one. “I just left them there, that was all.”

“Did you unroll them or show them to any one ? ”

“No.”

“Sure ? We aren't going to blame you, remember, but we must have the facts. Between this house and the printing works some other person *must* have got at that roll. Now, think. Did you loiter on the way ? ”

The small boy started, opened his mouth sharply, and shut it just as quick.

“Out with it ! ” encouraged Mill. “You *didn't go* straight home, did you ? ”

“N-no,” faltered the day boy—“I remember now. I met young Cole of Fraser's, and a few others. They were going to have stump practice at the far end of the field. They asked me to come, and I—I went.”

“Well, proceed.” But don't omit anything.”

“I—I played for about twenty minutes, and I slung my coat across one of the old benches which have been shifted to that corner. The bench was some distance from where we were at play. Of course, that roll of proofs was in the coat-pocket all the time——”

“Did any one come and sit on the seat ? ”

“Four or five fellows strolled up there, but I don't think they could have meddled with the coat, because we asked them to join us, and they did. Then we sort of picked up sides and—and”—Manderson puckered his brow as in stress of thought, “there *were* two bigger fellows on that bench for a bit ; I just had a glimpse of them as I rushed about.”

“Their names ? ”



"Jock! You! What on earth's the matter?"

The boy shook his head; then, slowly—"I fancy one must have been that big, dull-looking chap in Bishop's House. His name's something like Rum—Rum——"

"Rumbell?"

"That's it!" Manderson brightened at once. "And the fellow with him belongs to Bishop's too. Rather sallow sort of man; slops forward a bit—sticks his elbows—so."

"Locker, for a cert!" exclaimed Mill, and the others nodded.

Manderson being dismissed, it was decided to send at once for Locker and Rumbell. There was such a long wait that they wondered if the summoned ones refused

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to come. At length, however, ushered by Kirkwood's fag, the precious couple appeared. Locker tried to be casual.

"I was told you wanted me," he said. "Any mistake?"

"None," said the captain briefly; "I want you both. Have you seen a copy of the new *Pennitonian*?"

"Oh, yes," murmured Locker; "it was dropped into my den this morning. I haven't read it much yet."

"No? But you've read 'Notes by the Way'?"

"Oh, yes." Locker paled now. "I glanced at them," he admitted.

"I expect you did. And now"—Mill

pointed at the copy on the table—"please tell me which of you wrote *this* pleasant paragraph—was it you or was it Rumbell?"

"What the—I don't know what you mean."

"You know perfectly well what I mean!" roared the captain, banging down his fist, and the suddenness of that made both of them quake. Rumbell, indeed, was visibly trembling, while Locker, flushed and furtive, glanced towards Poddy.

"No," forged on Mill, "you needn't suppose that Scott is your accuser, for he certainly isn't. I've had you brought here on strong evidence from quite a different source. . . . Now, no more beating about the bush! Is this Rumbell's work or is it yours?"

"It's mine," said Locker sullenly. Then, with angry heat—"It's true, too, every word of it. I challenge Scott to deny it. If——"

"Stop!" cut in Mill. "There goes the bell; we mustn't stay for more now—the whole thing shall be settled at some later time. Come—we must all bustle!"

Locker, of course, was galled to reflect that his deed had been traced so easily, but now, as it were, his back was against the wall, and he imagined he might yet escape by reason of his statement being true.

There was, however, a sharp surprise in store, for Mr. Bishop, calling the house together that night, stood with a copy of the *Pennitonian* in his hand. Locker was ordered to stand up.

"I would hardly have believed," said the house master sternly, "that one boy could act so meanly towards another, yet I am given to understand that you are the author of this shameful item!"

Locker flushed darkly, again he felt he must needs fight for it.

"Yes, sir, I wrote it—and it's true!" he blurted. "You may ask Scott yourself if——"

A gesture of rebuke silenced him.

"There is no need for me to ask Scott anything," was the brisk retort—"for the simple reason that I've known about this pony-trap adventure ever since the time of its occurrence."

Locker gaped; he felt as though his one prop had fallen away.

"Scott and his friends," proceeded Mr. Bishop, "did not, as you state, attend Wenley Horse Fair at all, though it is true they were out of bounds. The important thing, however, is that Scott came straight to me next morning and confessed as to the whole matter. Because of his courage in doing this, I consented to call the incident closed. So, you see, your barbed shaft has missed—and you must not complain if it comes back to rest on you." The speaker reached for his cane. "Yours is the meanest act I have ever known since being a master at this school. Please step here—and bend."

Nothing, after this, could have been more complete than the downfall of Locker, and all that he stood for. The one or two who had still hovered round him now definitely came in on the side of those who were working to put some healthier life into Bishop's, and Hugh Puffett was prompt to forsake neutral ground. His first act, after Locker's discomfiture in hall, was to visit Poddy's study, bringing with him a crumpled cap.

"It's the one you lost," he explained. "It doesn't matter, now, how I came by it, but Locker got to know about its being

in my cupboard, and he somehow wormed out the facts. On my solemn word, though, I had nothing to do with this last caper of his; you mayn't quite believe me, but——"

"I do believe you," was Poddy's sober answer. "In fact, although we always looked on you as the leader of that little lot, I see now that Locker was really the mainspring in everything. That was his method; he preferred shelter to risks."

"I've reason to know it," was the bitter response. "However, I've done with him now, and most other fellows have too. I've nothing to crow about; don't want to pose as the good and reformed character." Hugh frowned at the door-handle, giving it a fierce turn. "I've been a beast to you, always," he added with zest, "but for the future I'm going to back you hard!"

Having delivered which, he slammed the door and departed.

Locker's chance stone, as it were, flung into the pool of school life, continued to broaden out in ripples, and Kirkwood, on the day following, obeyed a summons to the Head Master. He found that gentleman with a copy of the *Pennitonian* on the table before him.

The editor saw at once that explanation of the offending item was about to be demanded again, and now he was able to give a complete version. On hearing that the disagreeable Locker had been dealt with by Mr. Bishop, and the slow Rumbell "talked to for his good," the Head appeared in the main to be satisfied.

"As a matter of fact," observed the old gentleman, "I understand that Scott is doing well by his house!"

"Splendidly, sir. I expect none of us outside can judge the amount of work he's put in this term to improve the spirit of the place."

"H'm, yes." The Head Master pursed his lips. "H'm, yes," he added: "I think, Kirkwood, that you might note down another paragraph to occupy the place of the one coming out. . . . Just take a pen, will you?"

The result came out two days later. Many, of course, had been chattering about that surreptitious contribution to the mag, so when revised copies came to hand (Bishop's by then having won another House Match), it was the natural thing for every one to turn up "Notes by the Way." And at the tail of these, in place of the ill-humoured fragment, there now appeared the following:—

"Bishop's House have to be congratulated on the energies of their new prefect, P. Scott—better known as 'Poddy.' G. H. Whitley now departs to take up his well-won scholarship, as reported elsewhere, so Scott rises to be Head of the House. Before this, we understand, he had been marked as a School Prefect, so we have pleasure to record the double success. It is also interesting to remark that Bishop's House, having defeated Harding's, are now in the final for the Cricket Cup—a distinction they have never known before. The match, to be started on Tuesday the 21st, will, of course, be *versus* Gowans'."

So that was that—distinctly a neat rounding-off of what had begun as an unpleasant affair, but which had somehow ended in a very different way.

CHAPTER VI

CRICKET AND A CRISIS

THE day of the Cricket Final dawned as a day of promise. Gowans' were a strong team, playing four school colours, and including Trevor-Smith, a bowler of uncommon speed. Other phases, however, made the rival elevens fairly equal, as was proved by the fact that Gowans' opening score of 213 was answered with a Bishop's total of 209; Gowans' going to the wickets for their second knock on the Wednesday at 2.35. Bishop's two main bowlers—Rowe and Jackson Ma—were happily both in form. Gowans' after losing their third wicket for 13, stone-walled desperately to try to avert things (for which they were acidly accused of trying to win by the clock). They recovered somewhat, but their last wicket fell for a total of 116.

Poddy, who had worked fearfully hard at mid-on, hurried to buy a bag of bananas, and with these he got up in the shade of the bushes. He was still there—the first wicket men were just going out—when there was a rustle and a terrier dog came bounding around him with delighted yaps.

"Tatters!" gasped Poddy. "Can it be?—Tatters!"

No wonder he was astounded, for this, beyond question, *was* Tatters, the faithful pet of his early days—that he had left in charge of the Flints, the people with whom he lodged while at Barnport.

"What's the matter—where have you sprung from?" he demanded, and tried to catch the dog as he spoke. But Tatters, frisking madly, began to tug at his master's

sleeve—striving, beyond doubt, to make him follow.

Poddy, quick to understand, crammed the bag into his blazer-pocket and said, "All right, go on!" being then led up to the rail of the Beech Dip. Clambering this, and plunging into the bushes, he almost fell over some one who crouched there. It was the form of a boy in well-patched garments—no other than Jock Flint.

"Jock! You! What on earth's the matter?"

"I'm in awful trouble!" Jock's features as he spoke fully bore out his words; he appeared, indeed, to be in such a state of fear that he was hard to recognise as the merry Jock of old, the glad young scapegrace of Pebble Road School. "It's—it's father!" added Jock. "They've locked him up. An' now they—they're searching for me!"

"But what have you done?"

"Nothin'—truly. It was father. I—I'll tell you."

Jock's was a sorry tale, told with starts and pauses, becoming clear to Poddy only by degrees. Jock, it appeared, on the previous night, had been ordered by his reprobate father to row out to a big, richly-furnished yacht left unoccupied in the bay. Not until his father had swarmed stealthily aboard, to return with a big bundle, did Jock realise that theft was the object of this nocturnal trip. The boy had tried to protest, but received only cuffs for his pains.

"When we had put ashore," proceeded Jock, "I was forced by father to help carry the spoil—when suddenly, from behind an old hulk, out jumped several dark figures. They were police; they



“ Oh, hurrah ! ” gasped Jock—“ found at last ! ”

had been watching. They captured father, but I, dropping my parcel, managed to get away.”

“ You were followed, I suppose ? ”

“ I was that—an’ all I felt was that I’d best be clear of Barnport at once. I’ve had a time of it gettin’ so far as this. I expect they’ll have my description out ; it will hardly be safe for me to be seen, even hereabouts. Poddy, you’ll help, won’t you ? If I’m caught they—they’ll never believe I’m not to blame.”

Poddy was perplexed ; it is no simple matter to do just the right thing when a problem such as this is sprung on one all in a moment. But he felt, anyhow, that he couldn’t fail a friend who had shown him so much kindness in the past.

“ What you really need,” said Poddy

thoughtfully, “ is a good place to hide until I can find out what’s happening at Barnport.” Poddy’s eyes, as he spoke, wandered towards the Manor Woods, and then he got a bold idea. “ I say, *that’s* the place, if we had time to get there ! ” he added.

“ What place ? ”

“ I’ll show you—follow me. But cautiously. If we’re spotted by one of the keepers our plan will be spoilt. Come on ! ”

With the greatest caution they entered Penniton Woods, stalking along like a couple of Indians till at length they had gained the tree-enclosed Manor lake. Jock, by this time, was less timid, more like his old self, while the little dog Tatters was so overjoyed at being with his rightful

master that it was a task to keep him quiet.

"There are punts here," whispered Poddy. "In a few minutes we shall be on that island. There's a small tumble-down hut there, with luck we shall find it deserted."

Such was actually the case; indeed, on pushing through the tangled growth, and entering it, Poddy found the island hut just as he had left it—even the bits of paper and the halfpennies, relics of that last visit, were still upon the table and floor.

"Good!" observed Poddy. "It's clear that no one ever visits here, so you may judge yourself quite safe. Here's a bag of bananas, and I'll bring you more grub at the earliest moment. Have you any coins?"

"No."

"Well, I'd better leave you some. I may be prevented getting back here to-day, in which case you must venture forth and buy food for yourself. Three shillings, look—I'll drop them in here for safety."

Poddy, from his pocket, had produced the famous brass egg, and opening this up, he dropped the silver in. Then, leaving the egg in Jock's hands, he departed hurriedly, re-entering the playing-fields in time to see the sixth wicket fall.

"I say, where on earth have you been?" was Charteris's greeting. "I had to send in Morrison, and now Rowe's going out. What made you slip off like that?"

"Can't explain now," puffed Poddy, for he was blown and flushed with hurrying. "How's the score? Oh, help——!" for he had lifted his eyes to the score-board "51 for six. The worst seems to have happened."

The worst, however, had not exactly happened, for Rowe, having to take the last of the over, had been clean bowled by Trevor-Smith. Rowe, abashed, was trailing back and Carruthers was walking out.

Charteris turned to Poddy again. "Buck up and stick on your pads," he urged. "You must go in next. If only I had a man who could keep his head."

Charteris was naturally a trifle peeved. Top-scorer with 27, with the misfortune of being given out l.b.w.; he himself had not found Trevor-Smith unplayable. There was no real reason why the man should be skittling out Bishop's like this.

Carruthers, though in a scratchy way, added 9 to the score before being snapped in the slips, and Poddy came out to face the rest of that over.

Jackson Ma., during all these recent calamities, had been steadily stopping balls at the other end, so Poddy, in view of the circumstances, began by taking a leaf from this same book. Jackson Ma., unluckily, presumed on this; if Scott were going to be wary too, "then perhaps it was time for some one else to go out to 'em," and let fly. Jackson did so; he went out to the next ball, missed it—and was neatly stumped.

Then Aggle came to the wickets—one of the most promising "stylists" in the school, but dreadfully nervous. So long as he had Smallwood's medium stuff to deal with he was fairly well composed, despite the fact of its being all of a beautiful length. He scored 10 off this, with a fluky 2 from the fast man, and then, confused, tried an impossibly short run when Poddy had clearly cried "No!"

When Hugh Puffett came out, with the score at 72, Poddy had not yet scored,

though twice, off Trevor-Smith's bowling, he had put dangerous ones through the slips—the second, indeed, being a hard chance. For all that, he was beginning to get the measure of Trevor-Smith; the man was terribly fast, and yet, as Charteris had said, he held no surprises. Poddy braced up and drove the next for four.

It was eloquent of the new and improved edition of Hugh Puffett that he did not try to steal honours at any cost. Impressed by that boundary of Poddy's, and by that old dogged light in his partner's eyes, Hugh modestly prepared to keep his end up.

Poddy, having captured the bowlers to some extent, determined to force matters—a glance at the clock, indeed, made him realise the necessity for this. The 100 was up in the course of five minutes, with play altogether bright, and with ceaseless applause from the crowd. As Poddy crouched more and more—for he was a hitter of that sort—clouting at everything, the plaudits uprose to bursts of delight from the Bishopites, till every one felt that if Bishop's lost it must be the clock which would beat them.

When Bishop's, within two minutes of "time," were still five runs short of their rivals, there was an excitement round that field quite impossible to describe. There was a bye to help, and then a slam by Poddy to the pavilion rails that simply stirred the echoes in the way of wild cheers, yet it was a glance-stroke of Puffett's—who had scored 7 to Poddy's 40—that actually did the trick.

"Hooray! Hip, hip-hooray!" A tumult on every hand; a rushing across the field. "Bishop's bag the Cup!"

The next hour was a pure whirl, with cheers and back-thumping and much of

laughter. Poddy remembered it all in a sort of daze, with vague recollection of drinking tea in about five successive studies. Mug Eaton, who appeared to have staked all on victory, had laid in an enormous stock of food, perhaps the dispensing of which consoled him a bit for scoring 5 and a "duck." When Poddy fell on a dozen of spare cutrounds, some sardines, a bottle of lemonade, and a hunk of loaf cake, Mug suffered the same to be borne away without pressing to know why.

It was a hard sprint for Poddy to get to the Manor Island and back before lock-ups, but he did it, and on regaining the house he made haste to write a letter to the hearty yeoman who had "adopted" him—Farmer Scott—explaining about Jock Flint's plight. As the farmer was Jock's uncle, this seemed the wisest course to pursue. Having caught the post with this, by means of the letter-basket in the hall, Poddy—at last—was able to change out of his cricket flannels. His final thought, as he lay down to rest, was as to Jock Flint's fate, and whether that luckless youth would manage to sleep in his island refuge.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRUTH MADE KNOWN

JOCK FLINT, in the island hut that night, not only slept, but soundly, awakening next morning to a song of wild birds and a cluck of fowl in the sedges. Having broken his fast with sardine sandwich, with a share-out for Tatters, he quaffed what was left of the lemonade, stole forth and punted across to the mainland. Here

Poddy—hoping to get off First School this morning—had promised to visit him.

Finding a nook well-screened by bushes, Jock sat down and drew from his pocket that odd little souvenir, Poddy's brass egg. This object had ever been a source of attraction to Jock, and he remembered a day, before Poddy entered Penniton College, when the pair of them had visited these woods on purpose to test the worth of a scrap of paper found within the egg.

The scrap of paper was still there, so Jock drew it out to view the writing afresh. It was ill-spelt, but now—as on that earlier occasion—Jock believed the translation to be,—

*“Woods at Penniton. Lake Island—
North. Peak-east. Smoke-west. Y
elm-South. Opals where log is.”*

“Some of these points,” murmured Jock, “I remember we found, but we were beaten to know what ‘Y elm’ meant. There are such crowds of elms in these woods that the spotting of one seems hopeless. Still”—Jock arose to his feet—“I’ve a good mind to quest round again. It’s early yet; there must be heaps of time.”

Keeping the dog well to heel, Jock pushed his way off, attempting a direct path, but—owing to the density of growth—being frequently compelled to deviate. He was helped, however, by the sun, which had just risen, and he was careful to keep this on his exact left.

After a weary mile, during which he must have inspected hundreds of elms, he felt compelled to surrender, not merely because he was scratched and torn, but also for fear of missing Poddy. So round

he wheeled, and the first thing he ran into was a towering elm whose two main branches parted above the short trunk to form an almost perfect Y.

“Oh, hurrah!” gasped Jock—“found at last! And now—can I bear straight back to the island?”

This time he positively refused to let anything divert his steps, and so somehow he came to the main drive, crossed it and stumbled into scrub. This was on high ground, so that he could see the tops of the island poplars straight ahead. Wading forward, keeping these poplars in view, he ran presently into—a log!

There were plenty of fallen tree-trunks about the estate, but this was hewn, and cut so short that it really did form a huge log. Jock applied himself to push it over, but years of creeper growth had it tightly held.

Jock was just wondering what he should do when he thought he heard steps on the near-by carriage-road. He stole thither, to behold Poddy coming along—and in company with no other man than his—Jock’s—own uncle, Farmer Scott of Stowell Barton. The last-named, on receiving Poddy’s letter, had driven over early, and the pair had chosen this route to the Manor Island.

Jock rushed to meet them, and the farmer, prepared to find his nephew in a woebegone state, was astonished to see this flushed, excited youth burst sud’nly from cover. After a hurried greeting, Jock exploded with—

“Poddy—I’ve found it! The log! I’ve found it!”

The rest was rather a jumble of words, but the eager youth led them on over the scrub, pointing to the log—and also to

the fact that the peak uprose on the east, with some chimneys of the Manor away opposite which might account for "smoke west." Indeed, imaginary lines drawn from the points mentioned would unfailingly cross at the point of this log.

Poddy admitted all this, as did Farmer

a wad of something like oilcloth in a tiny hollow.

Pulling this out, he saw it was a thick bag, with a draw-string, half decayed yet holding intact, and from within he drew another thick wrap of oilcloth. This contained a well-preserved map, with copious



"Opals!" gasped Jock. "They must be, but—what beauties!"

Scott, so they bent with a will to try to roll the log over. This, at last, they accomplished, much of the rotted portion peeling away, while some of the birthing brambles had to come by the roots. Insect life scuttled in the brown loam and in the stripped bark beneath, but Poddy, exploring with the toe of his boot, discovered

notes, and also a letter addressed to "*Squire Penniton, Penniton Manor*" in ink almost faded out. But in the bottom of the outer bag five objects still remained, and, as Poddy tipped these into his palm, there was a breath of amaze.

"Opals!" gasped Jock. "They must be, but—what beauties! I've seen them

on that coloured plate at school, but—never like this. What ought we to do?"

"Why, visit Squire Penniton at once," was his uncle's brisk response. "We've this letter to give him now, besides which Poddy here heard from the squire this morning with a request that he should call—he has leave from school for the purpose. Something important, I understand, has happened; maybe, indeed, all these questions are on the point of being answered and cleared up. In any case, the squire being a J.P., I think it best, Jock, to lay your case before him, and perhaps obtain his help."

Jock, apparently, had no objection, so they set straight along for the Manor, being shown into the great oak hall, where the squire received them when he came out from breakfast with his steward. He listened with the closest interest to what they had to relate, and then, seating himself at the head of the massive table, proceeded to open the letter directed to him—the one so strangely found beneath that log in the woods.

By the perusal of that letter the squire was undoubtedly affected; it was not lengthy, yet many minutes elapsed before the old man spoke. Then he turned his shrewd gaze on Poddy.

"This," he remarked, tapping the letter, "actually concerns the matter about which I wanted you to hear, so its discovery is well-timed; it serves to put the facts beyond all doubt. You recollect Tom Thimble, that queer old mariner who used to speak to you on the docks at Stonehithe?"

"Why, of course, I remember him well," answered Poddy—"it was he who gave me the brass egg."

"Just so. He was, you know, the

victim in a street accident, and although this took him into hospital, making him a bed-lier for some long months, yet it seems to have had the effect of improving his memory—the power to recall things has come to him by degrees. Some first statements he made were reported to me; it was on account of this, Poddy, that the Barnport solicitors wrote to request the facts of your earlier history."

"Then you——?" began Poddy.

"Yes, I was the client to whom they referred. Well, here on the table is a statement carefully taken down from Thimble's own words, but I need not read it all now. I will cut it short by giving a bare review. It appears, my boy, that Tom Thimble crossed from Australia in the *Sarah Poddy*—the vessel which carried both you and your father."

"My father!"

"Yes. You, of course, were only an infant, but Thimble, handy in most things, made shift to act as 'nurse,' and it was the day before the storm that the facts came out. The sun-browned man informed Thimble that, contrary to paternal wishes, he had gone out to prospect, and after varying luck, had married in Adelaide. Soon after, hearing rumours of the 'Moon Opal,' he set out again for the wilds, and there fell ill with fever, being absent for more than twelve months. But actually he discovered the exact locality of the opal, made a careful map, and returned with a few choice specimens to support his words. The triumph, however, had the saddest ending, for he regained Adelaide to find that his young wife—whom he had left in the care of parents—had passed away, leaving him one legacy—yourself."

The squire paused, referring to the MS.

"Tom Thimble, when gales threatened, was taken into this traveller's confidence—being entrusted with the opals, the map as to where they were found, and a letter. All these, together with the child, Thimble was to deliver into the keeping of the wanderer's father—to Squire Penniton, in fact—myself. For he was my own son, Gerald—and you are my grandson."

There was a dead pause, an exchange of glances. Squire Penniton, though his eyes were gentler, seemed the least moved.

"You are surprised," he continued, "and naturally, but I have felt the truth almost from the first. On the first night that I saw you, something seemed suddenly to tell me you were Gerald's boy. However, to go on.

"The storm broke in earnest, the *Sarah Poddy* was soon in dire straits, and, after weathering brokenly for thirty-six hours, she began to founder. The skipper had been washed overboard, with others, and I am proud—and you will also be proud to know, that Gerald, taking charge, saw the crew embarked in boats before thinking of himself.

"Tom Thimble also stood by him. It seemed doubtful whether boats could live in such seas—they had seen one capsize—but to stay on the wreck was certain death. Those two were scrambling aft to try their own luck when the last mast crashed down, rendering both senseless. When Thimble vaguely recovered he was urged by Gerald—who could not move—to fetch the child and get away. The small boat they had hoped for was already in the sea and dragging astern. Fetching the child, Tom lowered him in and then stumbled back to Gerald. His groping

hands told him it was too late now; your father was past aid."

The squire's voice had grown husky; he paused for rather a greater period before proceeding.

"Even now," he continued, "poor Tom Thimble's brain is unequal to putting matters clear as to this picture; we may conclude, however, that, on getting back to the stern rail, Tom found nothing beneath his gaze but a thunderous sethe of waters. The boat, in fact, containing yourself had been wrenched away—and now the ship was positively splitting. Tom has a hazy recollection of diving, of being sucked under, of clutching at some object—the roof, he believes, of a deck-house—and of drifting for what might have been hours or days. Finally he was picked up by a south-bound trawler. He had the sense to make known the fact of his mission here, and finally he was put ashore at Barnport.

"That," proceeded Squire Penniton, "chanced to be the very period when I was absent in Sydney, making vain inquiries as to my truant son, so good Tom Thimble found this house all but closed and with one caretaker. Now, what he had brought he had vowed to give into my hands only, so, faithful to that, he imparted nothing of the secret, but—meaning to pay another visit later—he hid his oilskin bag under that log. There is evidence that, even at that moment, his brain was suffering from privation and exposure, but, sailor-like, he contrived to 'take his bearings,' noting them on a scrap of paper, which latter he stowed away in the brass egg—a 'mascot' he had picked up in a North African bazaar, and which he had carried about for years.

"The rest explains itself. Thimble got out of Barnport, on some sort of tramp coaster, falling ill almost immediately--and during that illness, as the postponed result of the blow received from the falling mast--memory vanished altogether. A pathetic derelict, poor Tom drifted about, till one day fate brought him to rest at Stonehithe. There he met you, the name 'Poddy' stirring a chord of memory, but no more. Fate, however, still dealing with the pieces in its own mysterious way, brings all together at last. The picture is complete, the truth known--it is for us to plan the future."

The story was told; imagine the effect of it upon those who sat in that old-world hall, and the effect of it especially upon Poddy! The boy was left with a mixture of sensations, the least of which, perhaps, was actual surprise. There had been surprise, but momentary--he now realised that always he had expected, sometime, somehow, to come face to face with the facts he most sought to know.

All three stayed at the Manor for luncheon, and out of that wonderful day grew many others.

Jock Flint, bearing a letter from the squire, returned to Barnport of his own free will, where, after a brief delay, he was absolved of blame in regard to his father's misdeed. His mother now went to live with her brother at Stowell Barton, while Jock himself (who, even when Poddy had known him first, in those harum-scarum days, had felt a desire for learning) was, at once transferred, by

Squire Penniton's favour, to Penniton College.

The great rewards followed, where rewards were due--poor Tom Thimble being brought to Penniton directly he could move, and there being set up for life. Nor were Poddy's other friends, such as Joe Lumm, the night watchman, in any way forgotten, while Farmer Scott--that fine and jovial soul--declared he asked no better reward than the satisfaction of all that he had done.

Poddy's progress, he declared, was what had repaid him all the way, and he hoped the boy's career at school was not over yet.

Well, Poddy, in due course, became Second School Prefect, and in the running for the captaincy. This, however, he just missed, for Squire Penniton had a 'varsity period in view, and wished the boy to put in some holiday first. "Mug" Eaton and Charteris went up to Cambridge the same year.

The rest remains to be planned. There is the map that had cost so much, and the undoubted fact that, away in the heart of Australia, more of the Moon Opals are waiting to be fetched.

If Poddy ever goes, Jock Flint will go too, and perhaps many others--while the expedition will be fitted so as to preclude any repetition of disaster. It will not be for a time.

"No hurry about that," declares Squire Penniton--"no hurry at all. We have happily ended one story, so let's for a while be content!"

The Rugby Full Back

By B. S. CHANTRILL

English International Full Back

THE full back, being the last line, should have all the defensive qualities very highly developed. His first job is to defend his own line, and only when he is very efficient in this, should he attempt to develop his attacking powers. The most important characteristics should be good kicking with both feet, sound tackling, and a safe pair of hands.

It is a great asset to be able to kick with both feet, although it is not absolutely essential, as there have been, and are, a number of good full backs who can only use one. Still, it is obvious that one is at a distinct disadvantage very often if not able to use both. Greater length can be acquired with the left foot on the right touch-line, and with the right foot on the left touch-line. Watch any full back, who, having fielded a ball near the touch-line, immediately runs towards the centre so as to get a wider angle. He would get very little length into his kick had he to use the foot nearer the touch-line. Both feet can be developed with constant practice, so that in time, one should be equally efficient with either.

There are three different kinds of kicks, the punt, the drop-kick, and the place-kick. One should cultivate the first two with

both feet, but one foot suffices for the place-kick.

For the punt the ball is held lengthwise in both hands. The instep must be used for this kick, and also for the drop-kick. The secret of success in both these kicks is getting perfect timing with the swing of the leg and not just brute force. Included with the punt is the screw-kick. This is well worth perfecting, as one can get greater length, especially with or against a wind, than with an ordinary punt. The best exponent of this kick that I know is Sambrook of Leicester. As his handling is also good, he saves his forwards yards during a game. When playing with a following wind, it is advisable to kick higher than usual, as it will give you greater length; vice versa, kicks should be kept low against a wind. One can never emphasise too much the need for always finding touch. Therefore you must always sacrifice length for accuracy. Nothing is more depressing and tiring to a pack of forwards than when an opponent fields a kick by their full back and returns to touch with interest.

Full backs must assiduously practise the drop-kick with both feet, as they quite often find themselves in a favourable position to kick a drop-goal. Never refuse

a chance when it comes, as you may not get another, and your four points may just give the lead. Many a match has been won by a drop-goal. The drop-kick is also a good way of finding touch against the wind.

Now comes the place-kick. A full back should try to perfect himself in this kick, as he is generally much fresher than the rest of the team when a try has been scored, and therefore steadier and more likely to convert it. Nearly every one makes the mistake of having too small a hole. You must have a decent-sized hole, or else when your placer puts the ball on the ground it will fall over. It should be made so that the ball rests on the sides and the point of the ball is clear of the ground. The angle at which the ball is placed varies. When near the goal it should be upright, the angle decreasing the farther you get away. Use the lace or one of the seams for direction. Always remember, and this applies to all kicks, to keep your eye on the ball the whole time and follow through. Do not jab at it or you will often miskick. Get your non-kicking foot as close to the side of the ball as possible so as to obtain perfect timing with the swing of the leg. Always try to have the same player placing the ball for you, as you will get to know exactly when the ball is down.

The next important thing is fielding. No one who has not played can realise what a tremendous difference a safe fielder at full back makes to the rest of the team. With a bad fielder the effect is demoralising, the whole team being kept on tenterhooks as to whether he will catch the ball or not, and wondering if they should drop back and help him. The mental strain is very

little with a safe fielder, as they know he is to be relied upon. This is most important when you are on the defence.

There are two ways in which a ball can be fielded: by the hands alone or in a cradle formed by the outstretched arms and the chest. The second method is the safer one, especially with a wet ball or in a high wind. A very good idea, when possible, is to stand slightly sideways for fielding, as it minimises the chances of knocking on. All accurate fielding depends very much on anticipation, which also, by the way, makes up a lot for any deficiency in speed. Never let the ball bounce if you can possibly get to it, as it is a ten to one chance that it will bounce awkwardly for you. Always go all out for a catch. Also, if you happen to do this in your opponent's half, you stand a very good chance of making an opening for your three-quarters. When playing against a strong wind and the ball is kicked back over your line, never be afraid to touch down. Of course it looks much better to bring it out, but you do not know if you are going to find touch, and you may easily give a try away by not doing so. Anyhow, you are playing for your side, and it is generally to its advantage to have a drop-out.

Now comes the most important question of tackling. To the uninitiated this looks much more dangerous than it really is, as, if one knows how to tackle, one should come out on top nine times out of ten. Personally, I love tackling more than anything in Rugby. What a glorious feeling it is, when, just as an opponent, going all out for the line, hopes to dash by, you dive for him and bring him down! The only drawback is that after one has left school it is very hard to get any practice,

so that one has to rely solely on the chances during a game. All players must remember that they have to go hard at a tackle, as hard as they possibly can, and they must put their man down once they lay a hand on him. You may be forgiven for not being able to catch a man, but once you get him you must hold him. To go half-heartedly is to get hurt. Also it is quite likely that a player will fight shy of trying to pass you after a couple of good hard tackles.

There are three kinds of tackles, the side tackle, the front tackle, and the smother. The first is the easiest. The only thing to remember is not to get handed off. When going for the wing man "all out" for the line, one should try to bring him down in touch. This can be done by giving oneself a hefty twist as one dives for him and rolling him over. You must be careful not to land him on top of you, as you may be easily laid out. I was unlucky enough to do this in the Welsh match tackling M. G. Thomas, and felt quite groggy for a minute. The front tackle is by far the hardest. Your opponent has a great advantage over you, as he is going hard while you are just standing waiting for him. I think the only thing to do is to stand still, as directly you make a move in one direction he dashes past in the other; whereas, if you stay still he will probably dodge from side to side, not knowing which way you are going, and quite likely end up by running into you.

For the smother, you need to be strong. The idea is to prevent a man going over the line when you have tackled him near it. With an ordinary tackle around the thighs you would bring him down all right, but he would be sure to fall over and score.

So it is necessary to grasp man and ball and hang on to them.

One of the hardest jobs a full back has to do is to stop a good forward rush. You can do this in two ways, either by falling on the ball, but do not get your side penalised by staying on it too long, or else by fielding the ball and making a sudden dash through the pack. Quite often you can get through and get your kick to touch. A most important thing to remember is always to go for the man with the ball. Many a player, especially full backs, have been made to look very silly by not doing this. If you are left to deal with two men, rush the man with the ball, there is always a chance that he will give a rotten pass or that the other man will drop his pass. If you are fast, it is a good idea to come up on the open side of the man with the ball and make him pass; then you have a good chance of getting the wing man.

It is very necessary to have a good understanding with your three-quarters for defensive purposes. When a centre gets away with his wing backing him up, you probably will be in the best position to see what is going to happen. Sometimes it will be best for your wing to take his opposite number while you take the centre, and be careful he does not cut inside you, and vice versa.

Another thing you will have to find means to counter is the short punt over your head. One can generally tell when a player is going to do this, and so should be prepared to turn immediately.

A full back should always help in the attack when possible. Many full backs seem to ignore this altogether. He may easily start the movement that wins the

game. I was lucky enough to get the chance, and take it, when playing against Ireland at Belfast last season. As we were getting beaten forward, we had a gruelling time for three parts of the game. With the score at three points each and about a quarter of an hour to go, we got them back on their own line, and some one attempting to clear, kicked straight up the field to me. I caught the ball just inside their half and at once started a passing movement, which ended in Hamilton-Wick's scoring. This proved to be the turning point of the game, as we scored twice directly afterwards. But never overdo the attack. Defence comes first. Quite often one sees a full back running across the field, trying to do too much on his own, and then being tackled, when a kick would have done better.

One cannot possibly lay down any hard and fast rules as to where a full back should stand. It all depends on circumstances, and so one has to use one's own judgment. It is quite obvious that when playing against a wind one should stand well back, and with a wind fairly well up. Remember wherever you are, always to gain as much ground as possible by running before you kick. How many times does one see players field a ball and kick it at once when they could have run ten yards easily before doing so!

When a scrum is on your own line, a full back should stand anywhere near the scrum or behind it. Don't go up into the three-quarter line, as, should the opposing half beat yours, there would be no one to prevent him scoring. I got caught like this last year, so shall take care not to do it again. Once bitten twice shy.

Remember that to do your side and

yourself justice you have to keep fit, hence the need of training. Fives, if you are lucky enough to have a court, is a very good game to make you fit. It is advisable to go in for some game or sport during the summer, then you will not find it so hard to get fit for Rugger when the season comes round. It is no use putting off your training till Friday night for Saturday afternoon, as some players do. You have to train hard to play Rugger. A full-back should train in the same way as the three-quarters. Take part in all their running and passing movements, and always learn any new stunts they intend to carry out. It is advisable at the beginning of the season to do some long runs to get your wind in decent condition. When you have got over this, once round the field on training nights should be sufficient. To increase one's speed it is a good idea to trot to halfway and then go all out the other half, and do a sharp walk back. Half a dozen times each training will increase your speed quite a lot. Never train when you are not feeling fit, it will do more harm than good. Then, of course, your kicking must have constant practice. Have a few drop-kicks and place-kicks, and then get another fellow to do some touch kicking with you. Always try to make your training as real as possible. Don't take too much time with your kicks, also practise picking the ball up from the ground going at full speed.

To conclude, always remember the spirit of the game, to play for the game's sake and not merely to win. Naturally it is better to win, but what does it matter as long as you have had a good game! You are playing the finest of all games, so live up to it!

THEIR LAST MATCH

Ross Harvey



CHAPTER I

OUT FOR THE LEAGUE

FROM the chair, gentlemen, let me urge that this meeting gets on with the business just as quickly as possible," said Jack Norman in his cheery way, "otherwise Ted Bayley and I look like getting back to the school too late for 'lock up.'"

At once the fellows who composed the committee of the Ashmoor Juniors F.C. settled down in their chairs in a room in Secretary Jackson's house, and Jackson certainly did not waste a moment.

"To save time I propose that the minutes of last meeting be taken as read," he exclaimed. "Really, all we have to do is to select the team for next Saturday's league match against Cranston, the last league match of the season!"

SB. AN.

There was a thrill at that, increased tremendously when Ted Bayley, most industrious of centre-halves, laid a slip of paper on the table.

Neatly written on the paper were the positions of the three leading clubs in the Midshire Junior League. The table of results ran:—

	Pld.	Won	Lost	Drn.	For	Agst.	Pts.
Melton Swifts	16	12	2	2	36	8	26
Cranston	15	12	1	2	35	7	25
Ashmoor Juniors	15	11	2	2	32	8	24

The rest of the clubs forming the league were right out of the running for the championship, while the forthcoming Cranston v. Ashmoor Juniors fixture would complete the table. So the excitement at this committee meeting can well be imagined.

"Getting down to brass tacks, it comes to this," exclaimed Ted Bayley, examining

the table he had made out ; " if we draw with Cranston on Saturday, probably they will win the league on goal average ; if we just beat them, Melton Swifts are the winners. . . . For the Juniors to head the table, we have got to win, and win by five goals ! "

" Phew ! " whistled some one.

" Impossible, of course," added some one else.

" It's right all the same. To do any good we've got to win by five goals as I said."

" That's so ! " nodded Jack Norman briefly. " From the chair I propose that the Juniors gird up their loins and go for those five goals, and to do it—play six forwards ! "

Blank expressions appeared on all faces except Ted Bayley's, but Jack went on talking easily enough.

" It was done once by an English league club struggling to escape relegation on goal average," he declared, " and I don't see why the Juniors shouldn't make the experiment. Anyway, we have everything to win and nothing to lose."

" That's true."

" You mean, play one back, I suppose," said Jackson doubtfully, but Norman shook his head.

" No, two backs, but one of them well up the field all the time," he explained, " but only two halves, the back doing his utmost to act as centre-half as well as tackling his own job."

" Norman, it would never work ! "

" It might, if the sixth forward drops back when he's wanted," answered Jack Norman. " Anyway, that's my proposal—that Ted Bayley here joins me in the forward line, and that—everybody plays like a Trojan ! "

There was dead silence for a moment or two, although it was clear that Jack Norman's suggestion was thrilling the rest of the committee. But then Jack's word always did carry weight at these meetings, chiefly because he was the finest centre-forward the Juniors had ever had, with Ted Bayley almost as good in the middle line.

Presently the silence was broken by Ted:

" I second that proposal," he said in a voice that showed he and Jack had discussed the matter long before appearing at this meeting. " It's worth the risk ! "

" Well, then I'll put it to the meeting ! " rapped out Jack. " Those in favour ? "

First one hand went up in the air, then another, then all of them.

" Good ! " said the chairman. " I take it that the eleven is the same as last week ? "

" Yes," answered Jackson ; " we can't better it, can we ? "

" No, rather not," agreed Jack, jumping to his feet. " Mind, we are all out for five goals on Saturday, right out for them from the kick-off. . . . Ted, we shall have to scud for it like the wind ! We've none too much time ; not enough if that fog is any thicker ! "

The next moment the only two fellows from Ashmoor College who were members of the Juniors darted from the room, leaving the remainder of the committee a little staggered-looking.

CHAPTER II

IN THE FOG

" FOR an amateur detective, you aren't exactly shining to-night, Ted," groaned Jack Norman as he blundered into his

second ditch in a few yards. "Have you the faintest idea where we are?"

As a matter of fact Ted Bayley had not. Ever since he and Jack had left the committee room the fog had been growing denser, but the unfortunate thing was that the fog would be a very slender excuse in the eyes of Mr. Marston for late arrival at the school.

Jack was just about to point this out when Bayley hit upon a "clue" that gave him his bearings.

"Here's that stile we cut our names on yesterday, old top," he shouted suddenly. "We are right on the edge of Colonel Brooks' grounds!"

"Oh, good!" came Jack's relieved answer through the fog. "Pity we can't cut across the old chap's woods; it would save us half a mile of groping."

"Yes, and get us a licking," laughed Ted. "Where are you, Jack? I can't see a single thing!"

The chums had drifted apart, and, when Jack Norman shouted again, it was very difficult for Ted at the stile to locate the sound. At Jack's second shout, though, his chum grew uneasy.

"Where are you?" he repeated. "It sounds to me as if you were ploughing your way through some beastly undergrowth!"

"I am, I think——"

"Then you must have drifted through a gap in the fencing," exclaimed Ted. "You are on the colonel's ground, aren't you?"

"I don't know!"

There was some more blundering about among stunted bushes on Jack's part, then he thudded into something. He never saw what that something was, but the crash which immediately followed was appalling.

It sounded as if a hundred glass windows had been shattered at one and the same moment, and the resulting fragments of glass clattering down on a stone floor like a shower of rain.

Utterly aghast, Jack Norman plunged recklessly ahead, and by sheer luck reached the stile. As he was on the wrong side of it he certainly was on Colonel Brooks's ground!

"But what I blundered into, goodness knows," he gasped. "A tree, I suppose! Did you ever hear such a crash in your life? What had we better do, Ted?"

"Cut for it, I say," gasped the other fellow. "Something fell on the roof of the greenhouse, of course. . . . Jingo, we are spotted!"

Some one had loomed up in the fog close to the stile, a lantern held high in the air, but neither Jack nor Ted waited any longer. They just wheeled round in the fog and made off as fast as they dared run. As soon as the end of the road was reached, they struck a less dense patch of mist.

"In fact, it's straight going to the school now," Ted declared. "We shall be there in ten minutes!"

But even those ten minutes made it a very close race against the lock-up hour, so close that the school clock was actually chiming when Jack and Ted raced across the quadrangle.

Mr. Marston, the Fifth Form master, was on duty, as it happened, but he made no comment, and the chums hurried past him.

"Phew!" Jack gasped as they reached the study they shared. "The luck veered round at the last minute, Ted. . . . At least, let's hope it has! Of course, if I

was seen on that wrong side of the stile there will be trouble!"

"Oh, hang it all, the colonel can't say much to any one who trespasses by accident!"

"Humph!" coughed Jack doubtfully as he took his prep. books from the drawer. "There's no saying exactly what the colonel would or would not say. However, we will leave it at that!"

They did leave it at "that"—for about ten minutes—then the school porter came hammering at their study door.

"You are wanted in Mr. Marston's room, young gentlemen. . . . Yes, both of you. . . . At once, sirs!"

Jack and Ted put down their books, and with nasty sinking feelings repaired to the master's room. They pushed open his door in response to his invitation, and received the real shock of the evening on finding Colonel Brooks glaring at them.

Sternly Mr. Marston faced the two chums.

"I understand you two boys have been on Colonel Brooks' ground this evening?" he exclaimed.

"Not—not Bayley, sir," rather gasped Jack. "I did happen to stumble through a gap in the hedge. . . . Quite by accident, sir!"

"Oh!" suddenly stormed Colonel Brooks. "And was it by accident that you knocked my ladder down on the top of my greenhouse and smashed a couple of pounds' worth of glass?"

"Ladder?" choked Jack feebly. "Greenhouse!" He turned and looked blankly at Ted, and Ted looked as blankly back. Not even the colonel could doubt that both lads were bewildered, then Jack ventured a more coherent remark.

"I didn't touch a ladder, sir," he exclaimed. "I heard the crash, of course——"

"You didn't stumble into anything in the fog?" demanded Mr. Marston.

"Only a tree, sir—at least, I think it was a tree. . . ."

Jack stopped speaking, staggered by the sudden memory of that crash which followed instantly upon his slight collision. Perhaps, after all, the obstacle he had struck had been a ladder!

Anyway, Colonel Brooks entertained no doubt on the point.

"You've given yourself away, youngster," he said gruffly, "but I'm ready to admit it was all an accident and that the trespassing was the same. Still, you ought to have stopped to see what damage you had done instead of making off."

"I had no idea, sir——"

"Humph!" muttered the colonel. "Anyway, Mr. Marston, 'gate' the young rascal for the next half holiday, and we will say no more about it."

And the sentence came very crisply from Mr. Marston.

"Norman, you will remain in detention from two to five next Saturday. You can go!"

Jack and Ted went, too staggered for conversation for the moment. It was between the hours of "two and five" the next Saturday afternoon that the Midshire Junior League Shield would be won and lost! And without Jack Norman to lead their front line, Ashmoor Juniors would be very much like a boat without a rudder!

CHAPTER III

TED BAYLEY'S CLUES

TED BAYLEY had not earned the nickname of the "Tec" at Ashmoor School for nothing.

Only the previous term he had worked up a nice sequence of clues in connection with a minor theft in the school, so naturally this affair of the broken greenhouse intrigued him tremendously.

"You say the thing you thudded into was a tree," he exclaimed to Jack Norman.

"I think it was!"

"Anyway, you are certain it was not

moment he was free, he was racing along on his push bike for the stile, and there, right away, he struck a great clue. The greenhouse was much farther away from the stile than he had imagined.

Having obtained permission to examine the greenhouse, Ted was free to do as he liked, and he certainly set about his task in workmanlike fashion.



He slammed the ball into the net.

an obstacle that fell over when you collided with it," went on Ted. "If that is so, then it wasn't the ladder. You leave this matter to me, Jack!"

In spite of his eagerness to investigate matters, though, Ted Bayley was not at liberty to commence operations until after school the following day—Friday. The

He found the spot where Jack Norman had blundered through the break in the fencing, for it was the easiest thing in the world to trace Jack's journey through the undergrowth.

Abruptly, though, that journey sheered off towards the stile and at that spot there was a tree.

"The thing Jack blundered into," muttered Ted. "Phew! It's yards from the greenhouse!"

Ted promptly swerved towards the greenhouse and discovered a small toolshed at the back of it. From the garden he learned that the ladder which had caused the damage had been reared up against the shed!

"And that's absolute proof Jack did not knock the thing down," Ted exclaimed aloud. "Why, the greenhouse was *between* him and the ladder. . . . The chap who caused the damage was on *this* side!"

Thoroughly excited by now, Ted stepped into the shed, and there right in front of his eyes was the best clue of all—a battered old briar pipe! Near it were one or two match sticks, quite clean and so only recently thrown down.

Eagerly Ted picked up the pipe, and was about to examine it when a voice cut through the still afternoon air—the voice of a dishevelled-looking tramp sitting on the stile.

"Say, mister, what's that you've found there?" he shouted.

"A pipe!" answered Ted. "Why?"

"Because it belongs to me," grinned the tramp. "A nice, seasoned briar, isn't it? Yes, that's right! Given to me by my mother, it was!"

He held out his grimy hand as Ted approached, and Ted fairly thrilled. He felt that he was right on to the mystery now, and when Ted felt like that he was remarkably good at plunging ahead.

"Your pipe, is it?" he flashed. "Lost it last night, perhaps!"

"Yes, that's right——"

"Just inside that shed? Ah, I thought

so! You were having a smoke in there during the fog, eh?"

The tramp nodded, and Ted fairly raced ahead with his summing up.

"Exactly!" he exclaimed. "You were smoking and taking it easy when you heard some one plunging about in the undergrowth there. That scared you, so you pushed open the shed door, meaning to clear off."

"Y-yes!"

"And the door caught against a ladder and—and crashed it down on that greenhouse," went on Ted in a crisp way he had at times.

"Smashed greenhouse?" muttered the tramp. "I don't know anything about no smashed greenhouses——"

"Oh, yes, you do," said Ted sharply. "Now look here, a chap who ought to be playing footer to-morrow has been 'gated' for what you did. If you've got a spark of sportsmanship in you, you'll come straight up to the school and tell the truth!"

"Well, I 'aven't, mister, not a spark—in that way!"

"Not if it's made worth your while?" flashed Ted. "Own up and I'll give you half a crown, and you won't get into any row! All you'll be doing will be clearing a chap and preventing him suffering for what you did!"

The tramp blinked thoughtfully.

"Let's see the half-dollar," he said at last, and Ted produced the coin. The tramp examined it, then nodded.

"Lead the way to your school, mister," he grinned. "I'll confess all right—for half a crown!"

He pocketed the coin, and a quarter of an hour later was telling Mr. Marston

all about the accident to the greenhouse. Almost word for word his confession tallied with Ted Bayley's summing up, and, well, there could be only one result.

"As Colonel Brooks has gone away for the week-end, I cannot deal with you," Mr. Marston said sternly to the tramp.

Undoubtedly you were trespassing, but you say you lost your way in the fog. You had better go, and be more careful in future!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"And your detention, Norman, is, of course, cancelled," added the master. "Bayley, you certainly have shown considerable ingenuity in clearing your friend!"

Ted coloured modestly, then the whole affair was forgotten in the overwhelming importance of the last Midshire Junior League match of the season.

CHAPTER IV

FIVE GOALS TO GET

FIT and determined-looking, Cranston lined up for the kick-off the following afternoon, and none of them seemed to notice at the start that Ashmoor Juniors were playing six forwards.

A couple of perfectly correct offside decisions against them opened their eyes, though, and maybe they lost their heads a little. Certainly they made the mistake of concentrating on defence during the opening stages, and within three minutes Jack Norman was almost through.

Helped by Ted Bayley, he dashed past the left back and crashed in a lightning-like drive.

All the reward he received was to see

the ball rebound from an upright, while Ted lofted a subsequent chance just a few inches over the bar.

The goal-kick brought slight relief to the visitors, but there was no holding the Juniors' forwards at the start of that game. With burly Ted Bayley right up amongst them, there seemed to be two home players for every one of the Cranston chaps, and that longed for early goal came—Ted whipping the ball into the net from a perfect pass from Jack seven minutes after the start!

Cranston were still more upset by that early reverse, and the cup-tie sort of rush their forwards indulged in from the re-start certainly was a little wild.

It was well stopped by the home defence, anyway, then Jack Norman dashed through and again missed by inches.

Five minutes afterwards his luck veered round, for Ted Bayley put him through with a perfect pass, and Jack made no mistake with his shot. He slammed the ball into the net and the Juniors were "two up."

Cranston rallied finely from that point, but the home side were right on the top of their form. At the back of their minds, too, was the thought which Jack Norman put into words in a whisper to Bayley.

"One more this half and anything may happen," he said. "The two goals we have aren't enough, though!"

Ted nodded; he knew his chum's summing up was perfectly sound. To cross over three goals to the bad is enough to demoralise any team.

But that third goal seemed fated not to come. Right up until a minute or so from the interval Cranston were keeping the home forwards out, even if they had to

resort to the "kick anywhere" tactics to do it.

Still Jack Norman and his "five" other forwards were giving nothing away. They were doing their utmost to fling themselves through; in fact, they were playing faster than ever when it could have been only a matter of seconds before the whistle would call a halt in the match.

And almost on the stroke of half-time Ted Bayley seemed to have a chance. He snapped up a pass. He swerved his way through the half line, and had a back beaten beautifully. On he dashed, with the crowd roaring out the usual advice.

"Shoot—shoot!"

For a moment it looked as if Ted meant to take the advice, then he whipped across a back pass right on to Jack Norman's foot.

In his stride Jack took the ball and the next moment two things were happening—the visiting goalkeeper was fishing the ball out of the net and the referee was whistling for half-time!

"Jingo, we are going to do it!" Jack said excitedly. "Start the second half just as if it is a fresh match, you fellows, and go all out. . . . I believe we are going to do it!"

By this time the Cranston fellows had tumbled to what was happening. In consequence they started off the mark on resumption at a hurricane pace. For a matter of ten minutes they held their own, once going to within an ace of scoring. But it was little more than a flash in the pan. The amazing pace the Juniors were cramming on caused that.

At three-quarter time Cranston were playing three backs and packing their goal; five minutes later Jackson, at left-

half, had given Ashmoor Juniors a four-goal lead.

After that the game was bewildering.

With Cranston hopelessly at sea and a beaten team, and the Juniors playing like a very tightly wound up machine, the exchanges developed into a duel between Jack Norman and Co. and the visiting custodian. Magnificently the Cranston goalkeeper played, too, beating out shot after shot. At five minutes to time he still had to be beaten for the all-important fifth occasion—at three minutes to the end it was the same.

Then Ted Bayley got the ball. He ploughed his way through. He whipped a perfect pass out to the left wing, and just as perfectly the centre came across, a beautifully placed ball. Jack Norman tripped in his stride with a Cranston back blundering into him, but Jack was ready for that.

"Yours, Ted!" he shouted, and parted with the ball.

Bayley snapped up the pass, swerved slightly, then—Thud! He crashed the leather into the net, and the game was won and lost, with Ashmoor Juniors head of the Midshire Junior League for the first time in the history of the club!

A tremendous ovation greeted the home players as they left the field, and then some one came striding up to Ted Bayley—about the last man in the world Ted would have expected to see on the ground, Mr. Marston, the "second in command," up at Ashmoor School.

"Bayley, a moment, please!" the master said crisply. "When you brought that tramp person to me yesterday, did you know anything about him?"

"N-no, sir!"

“Well, I will tell you something—he is ~~a~~ present under arrest for a petty theft committed at Cranston!”

Ted looked startled, but he could not think of anything to say.

“A petty theft committed on Thursday evening somewhere very near the time he is supposed to have been in that shed on Colonel Brooks’ ground,” went on Mr. Marston. “Earlier that same evening the scamp is known to have been in a small eating house at Cranston; later he was at Cranston Workhouse, in the casual ward there!”

“But—but——”

“So it is perfectly clear that he was nowhere near Colonel Brooks’ ground when that ladder fell on to the greenhouse,” interrupted the master. “In consequence his ‘confession’ was nothing but a string of falsehoods. Can you explain at all?”

“N-no, sir,” rather gasped Ted. “I found a pipe in the shed and the tramp claimed it, and I gave him half a crown to confess the truth to you——”

“Or, in other words, you bribed him to make an utterly untrue ‘confession.’”

Ted Bayley flushed up a good deal and Mr. Marston’s manner changed suddenly.

“I *must* ask you, Bayley—had you any idea that the ‘confession’ was a bogus affair?” he said slowly.

“Not the slightest, sir!”

“Thank you!” answered Mr. Marston. “You were misled by your ‘clues,’ I suppose. . . . It is difficult to understand how Norman managed to knock over the ladder, but it is certain that your tramp didn’t. Norman, you will do your detention next Wednesday!”

“Yes, sir!”

“And, well I must congratulate Ashmoor Juniors on this afternoon’s performance,” added Mr. Marston. “I saw most of the second half, and—it was extraordinary!”

With which remark Mr. Marston turned on his heel, leaving Jack Norman and Ted Bayley, with plenty to talk about.

“Three Cheers for Felix!”

By J. C. BRISTOW-NOBLE

IT was a Sunday afternoon in June, and most of the boys of Double Peak Grammar School were in the large class room, deploring their misfortune in having such an out-of-date, heavy, racing boat. The general opinion was that the School stood a poor chance of winning the Mayor's Cup for the third time in succession, and thus making it their property, unless a lighter, up-to-date, better designed and balanced boat could be obtained, and the prospects of this seemed extremely remote.

The School was poor, for the boys did not come of a wealthy class, and even the boat it possessed had been begged with difficulty several years back.

On the other hand, the members of the Town Rowing Club were rich in comparison, and recently had equipped themselves with a racing craft much superior to that of the School.

Of all their rivals, the boys feared the Town club most, and not without good reason.

Twenty-five years ago the then Mayor had presented the cup for competition at the Town's annual regatta, held in July, just before the end of term.

Several rowing clubs, year after year, had a shot for the much coveted cup, but the Fates had looked to it that the trophy had never been won save by the School or the Town.

It had been put up for competition on the condition that it should be won three times in succession before becoming the absolute property of any one of the clubs eligible to compete. It was interesting to look back through the twenty-five years and notice the result of the races between the School and the Town. The first two were won by the latter; then the School had won on two consecutive occasions; then followed a number of years in which the two had won alternately with a monotonous regularity.

Now the School had won twice in succession again, and it was clear the Town did not intend it to win the cup outright without a tremendous fight.

The boys were proud and jealous of their old school's traditions on the river, and as summer after summer came round left no stone unturned to launch a formidable crew. Composed of boys of seventeen and eighteen, all in the hardest training, all of indomitable pluck, it can be imagined how they were feared by their opponents, whose training was never so thorough, although in the matter of age they held a slight advantage.

The boys were still bemoaning their wretched luck in having what one of them was now declaring an “old tub” to race in, when suddenly Clifford major and minor burst into the room. Both were

hot and panting, and it was obvious from the expression on their faces that they had just escaped from some unpleasant adventure.

"Fellows," said Clifford major, standing up on a form, "I crave your sympathy and attention. Felix will be absent from roll-call this evening, but perhaps will be none the less happy.

"A while ago we were in the little wood in old Crumpleton's park, and Felix was exploring the dark, mysterious tunnels of a rabbit's hole. Suddenly we heard stealthy footsteps, and looking up there was Crumpleton himself within half a dozen yards of us, with a particularly nasty, swishy ash sapling raised above his head. Felix, for the moment, was forgotten, and left. We jumped to our feet and ran as though for our lives. Crumpleton also ran, but he would not have got within striking distance if we had not got hung up on a barbed wire fence.

"This was the man's opportunity, and he jumped at it with a quickness that was surprising. He was on us in a jiffy, and for several moments let us know what can be done with an ash sapling, with a strong and quick hand and arm behind it.

"If, for my own part, I am able to sit down with comfort this side of the end of the term I shall be agreeably surprised, and more surprised still if Cliff minor recovers in double the time. The wire held him the longer, consequently he got the bigger hiding."

Clifford minor nodded in agreement, and his freckled face expanded in a large grin.

"But all this by the way," Clifford major went on. "What I want to impress upon you fellows, is the importance of your all putting your shoulder to the wheel to-night

and helping us on our way to bring Felix back to the fold. There is the possibility that old Crumpleton has got hold of him, but this, I think unlikely, because I feel he did not know the dear chap was with us, and because Felix hates strangers, and so would avoid him."

There were shouts from all parts of the room that the School was with the brothers in their calamity to a man, and the boy got down from the form.

The boat, for the time being, was forgotten, and all came crowding round to hear more of the adventure.

Felix, it must be explained, was a ferret. He was a large fellow, with a long, white, silky coat, pink eyes, and a nature gentle and affectionate. The whole School loved the animal, and of a truth the ferret returned the compliment. He was as fond of the boys as they were of him.

That night as eleven o'clock was striking, four sheets were tied together, and first Clifford major and then minor was lowered from the dormitory window to the ground below. Wearing sandshoes, the boys set out at a trot for the copse in Squire Crumpleton's park.

But they had not covered a hundred yards, when both suddenly threw themselves on the ground and rolled over and over into a deep, dry ditch. Barely twenty yards ahead two of the assistant masters, were strolling leisurely, presumably taking a constitutional before turning in.

The night was fairly light, the sky being cloudless and lit with stars and a new moon.

The masters stopped, turned round, and listened. The slight noise the boys made had been heard.

Next the men began to retrace their

footsteps. They stopped again when exactly opposite to where the Cliffords, holding their breath, were lying. They could not have been more than six feet from the boys.

"It sounded like something breaking softly through the hedge," one of them was heard to remark.

"No doubt a cat or dog," said the other. "Much as burglars seem to like this neighbourhood, I cannot imagine their even thinking of a raid on the school. There is nothing of value to be stolen."

Then one struck a match to light his pipe, and the boys held their breath the tighter, and even trembled a little.

The pipe having been lit, the two went on in the direction of their quarters. But it was not before their footsteps had died away that the Cliffords scrambled to their feet, and again began to make for the copse.

Nothing further of an unpleasant nature disturbed them, and soon they were searching the thickets and quietly calling the ferret by name. For an hour they hunted without result, and indeed, were about to return, both feeling most unhappy, when Felix suddenly made his appearance.

He came out of a large rabbit hole. Clifford major pounced on him with a cry of joy, and as he did so his eyes fell on a small, bright object lying in the mouth of the hole. He picked it up, and the two began to examine it, turning it over and over. It was a small silver box, beautifully chased. Both went down on their hands and knees, struck a match and looked into the hole, and to their amazement saw many other similar boxes tumbling out of a small bag. It seemed that the ferret had come across the bag, had

scratched it open, and had been playing with the boxes. Not all were of silver, one or two were of gold, and others of pewter, and cedar and other wood. All were of beautiful workmanship and design.

"I'll tell you what they are," said Clifford minor.

"Crumpleton's precious snuff-boxes that were burgled the other week," the elder interrupted.

"Of course," the younger went on. "He is offering a reward of £50 for information that will lead to their recovery."

"By Jove, yes! I remember now," Clifford major grinned.

"That £50 is ours, thanks to dear old Felix and Crumpleton himself. If the old man hadn't come across us this afternoon and driven us away, we may reckon we shouldn't have found the swag."

"I hope the burglars aren't in hiding, waiting to pounce on us and relieve us of it."

Both looked around a little nervously. Not a soul was to be seen or heard.

"We'll shin with the stuff to old Crumpleton," the elder boy continued. "If we take it to the Head it will mean giving ourselves away and a good hiding into the bargain. Crumpleton may be decent and keep his mouth shut. He will be in bed, but I bet he will not mind being hammered up for these."

The bag of snuff-boxes was given a shake, Felix was stuffed into a pocket, and the boys made their way out of the copse into the park. Not a light was to be seen in a single room of Squire Crumpleton's delightful old home. It seemed that the whole of the inmates had retired to rest.

Boldly the boys rang the front-door bell.

But it was not before it had been rung again and again that at last they heard a bedroom window opened and a voice say: "Who's there?"

The voice was unmistakable. It was Crumpleton's.

"It is us, sir," Clifford major replied. The squire leant slightly out of the

never lost; they were stolen. I will come down at once."

In less than half a minute the boys were in the library, telling their story as frankly as it could be told. It was listened to with suspicion. The squire was turning over in his mind whether the boys might have stolen the boxes as a joke, or even in the



There was Crumpleton with a nasty ash sapling raised above his head.

window, and the boys stood back from the porch so that they could be seen.

"Who do you mean by 'Us, sir?'" Crumpleton asked again irritably.

"Grammar School boys, sir."

"Oh, you wretched things! Well, what's the matter now? School burnt down?"

"We have found your snuff-boxes, sir."

"Found my snuff-boxes! They were

hope of benefiting financially by returning them. He thought it peculiar that they should be brought to him only a week after the reward had been offered, and under such strange circumstances. He counted the boxes; not one was missing.

"I suppose," he said, "you want the £50 reward."

Clifford major had a sudden inspiration.

"No, sir," he said, "we just want you to keep quiet about to-night, and to give the school a new racing boat."

The straightforward answer surprised and pleased the elderly man.

"You see, sir," the elder boy continued, "we are very keen to win the Mayor's Cup, and are afraid we shall find the task beyond us unless we secure a better boat. Ours is hopelessly out of date and far too heavy. We have won the cup twice in succession, as, of course, you know, and if we win it this summer it becomes the absolute property of the School. I am the captain of the boats; you could send me a letter, saying you would like to give us a new boat, because some of us have helped you to recover your snuff-boxes."

"I will think over all you have said during the next few days," the squire replied. "It is probable I shall buy you a new boat, but I give no promise to do so. It will depend on the inquiries I shall make during the next twenty-four hours. One thing I can assure you of, and that is that I don't want to get you into any trouble. I need not remind you that I was a school-boy myself fifty years ago. I wish I was one still. Now if you will wait until I get into some clothes I will see you to the boundaries of the School. It's one o'clock, and I don't like the thought of your returning alone, although at my age I am no protector. I am very grateful to you for bringing me my snuff-boxes—very grateful indeed! It's like returning me old and precious friends."

The three—the tall, gray-haired man, the two tall, strong boys, stepped out briskly through the night.

"Yes, I should like to see the School

win the cup," the squire said, as he bade his young companions good-bye.

Many pairs of hands and arms hauled first one and then the other back into the dormitory. All were very, very sleepy, but repose was impossible before they had heard the wonderful story the Cliffords had to tell, and not only heard it, but also thoroughly digested it. Then at last there was row after row of heads on white pillows slumbering and snoring as one.

Three days later Clifford major, the Captain of the Boats, received a letter in unfamiliar handwriting. He tore open the envelope anxiously, nervously, and turned to the signature at the bottom of the page. "Robert Crumpleton," he read, and then eagerly scanned the short note. It contained the joyous information that the writer shortly was presenting the School with a new racing boat in the hope that, with its help, the boys would win the Mayor's Cup and thus make it their own property. There was not a word about the snuff-boxes, which, all things taken into consideration, was just as well.

The boy mounted a desk, and calling his schoolmates around him, read the note. The reader may be left to imagine the cheers with which the musty old classroom rang. Masters came running, anxious to know what the excitement was about, and when they were told the news they also cheered.

Two weeks afterwards the boat arrived from a famous firm of boat-builders at Putney. It was a beautiful craft, a little lighter than the Town's, a bit better balanced, and of better finish.

Although the School crew, with Clifford major rowing stroke, and his brother No. 3, had been in hard training for quite a time,

The Town so far had only indulged in an occasional paddle. The boys' new boat, however, caused alarm in that camp, and the crew now set to work to make themselves as fit as possible for the great ordeal.

The opinion was expressed that the School had a better eight than it had had for some seasons. But unfortunately the Town was proportionately strong, and the same could be said of the other four crews that were making a bid for the cup.

As the big day drew nearer and nearer, the excitement increased. Six crews being engaged, there were five races. The four heats were decided on four successive evenings immediately preceding the day of the regatta. Hundreds of people flocked to the river's banks to see the races.

Never before in the whole history of the cup had more interest been taken. The fact that the School had a new boat, the fact that should it win the cup this summer it would be the School's for ever, coupled with the determination of all their opponents that the boys should not triumph without a desperate fight, aroused the enthusiasm of everybody. It was thought that the cup would go back to the Town, but the hearts of the people were with the boys.

The first heat was between the School and the Red Triangle Rowing Club. The School won by the comfortable margin of a length. The next race was a tough affair between a big eight from the Brewery in a heavy, old-fashioned boat, and the Bank Clerks of the Town. The clerks won by a few feet, and now found themselves due to row against the Town the following evening.

The Town, after a severe and exciting

struggle, came out the winners by a quarter of a length. The next draw resulted in the School being put down to fight against the Tradesmen's Rowing Club, a strong and plucky eight, but under trained. The School's more thorough training pulled them through by the narrow margin of inches.

So, you see, the boys reached the final by having to win two races, the Town by winning one. Hard lines on the School, but, after all, it was pure luck.

The final was rowed at four o'clock the next afternoon. It was the big event of an interesting programme. The day was beautifully fine, and never had more people been seen at the regatta. Both banks of the stream were thronged, and the whole course, which was a mile in length, was lined with punts, boats, house-boats, and small yachts, and amongst the whole huge concourse of people probably there was not a couple of hundred who were not ready to shout "School" the moment the starter's pistol cracked.

The Town crew pulled a good six stones more than the boys, which was a big advantage, apart from having a stroke of half a dozen season's experience.

The School's Head acted as starter. The Town got away a little the quicker, and took the lead, rowing a short, quick, plugging stroke, as is generally the case with crews that have not been under a first-class coach.

Clifford major pulled a slower and longer stroke. The style of the boys was infinitely superior to that of the Town. It was delightful to notice how well the crew kept together, how perfect was its timing, its swing, its leg drive.

Still the Town continued to forge ahead,

“THREE CHEERS FOR FELIX!”

inch by inch. At the quarter-mile post they were leading by half a length; at the half-mile post by nearly a length. Now, however, Clifford major, who had rowed fairly easy, sparing both himself and those behind him as much as possible, called to his crew to open out. At his stroke, the boat shot forward, and the spectators yelled with joy.

Now the real race began. Little by little the School gained more and more on their opponents. The faces of the boys were set with expressions of the greatest determination. They were fighting now in earnest, with fury, yet with coolness and discretion.

At the three-quarter mile post the Town's lead had been reduced to barely a foot. The latter spurred; the School followed suit. "Now! Now! Now!" the coxes of both crews were shouting; "School! School! School!" was coming from thousands of throats.

The boats were soon on even terms, and thus they swept on over the river's smooth surface for nearly a hundred yards.

Then again Clifford major shouted to a crew.

"All out, now, fellows," he said. The boys responded to their leader, and the School was seen to take the lead for the first time in the race, but only by inches.

The Town made one more desperate effort, but it was too late. The crew was thoroughly exhausted; the boys had rowed it almost to a standstill. Presently Four fell forward on his oar in a state of utter collapse; the School continued to progress, and swept past the winning post three-quarters of a length to the good.

The Mayor's Cup had been won outright at last after a twenty-five years' fight!

It was said afterwards that the cheering was heard six miles away. There were cheers for everybody concerned, the loudest and longest being for the crew, of course; then for Crumpleton; and then for old Felix the ferret.

"Why cheers for Felix?" the Head asked of one of the other masters.

"I don't know, sir," his companion replied, "unless it be because he is the Cliffords' pet."

